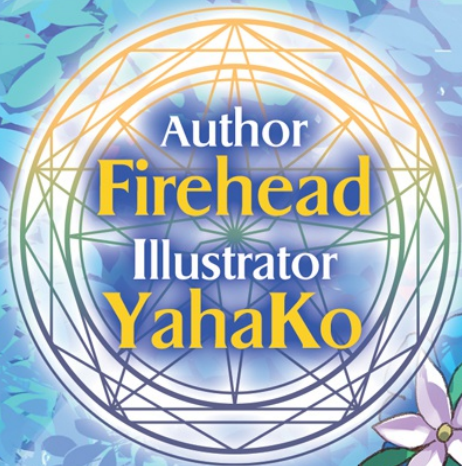




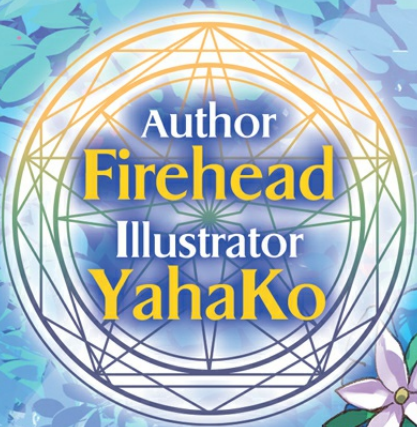
6



A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM



Author
Firehead
Illustrator
YahaKo

6

A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!





Character Introduction

In disguise

Me ♂

The person who created and played as Lufas Maphaahl in the MMO Exgate Online. After being told by the Goddess of Creation, Alovenus, "I will give you a new role," he was immediately whisked away to the game world, possessing his character's body.

Lufas Maphaahl

Once on the cusp of world domination and feared as the "Black-Winged Conqueror." Sealed for 200 years, she's now on a journey to meet her old friends, the Seven Heroes, as well as her old followers, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars.



♍ Virgo



♏ Aigokeros



♎ libra



♈ Aries



♐ Sagittarius



♊ Castor



♏ scorpis



♋ Karkinos

The Conquering
Twelve Heavenly Stars



Terra

The son of the Devil King and the leader of the Seven Luminaries.



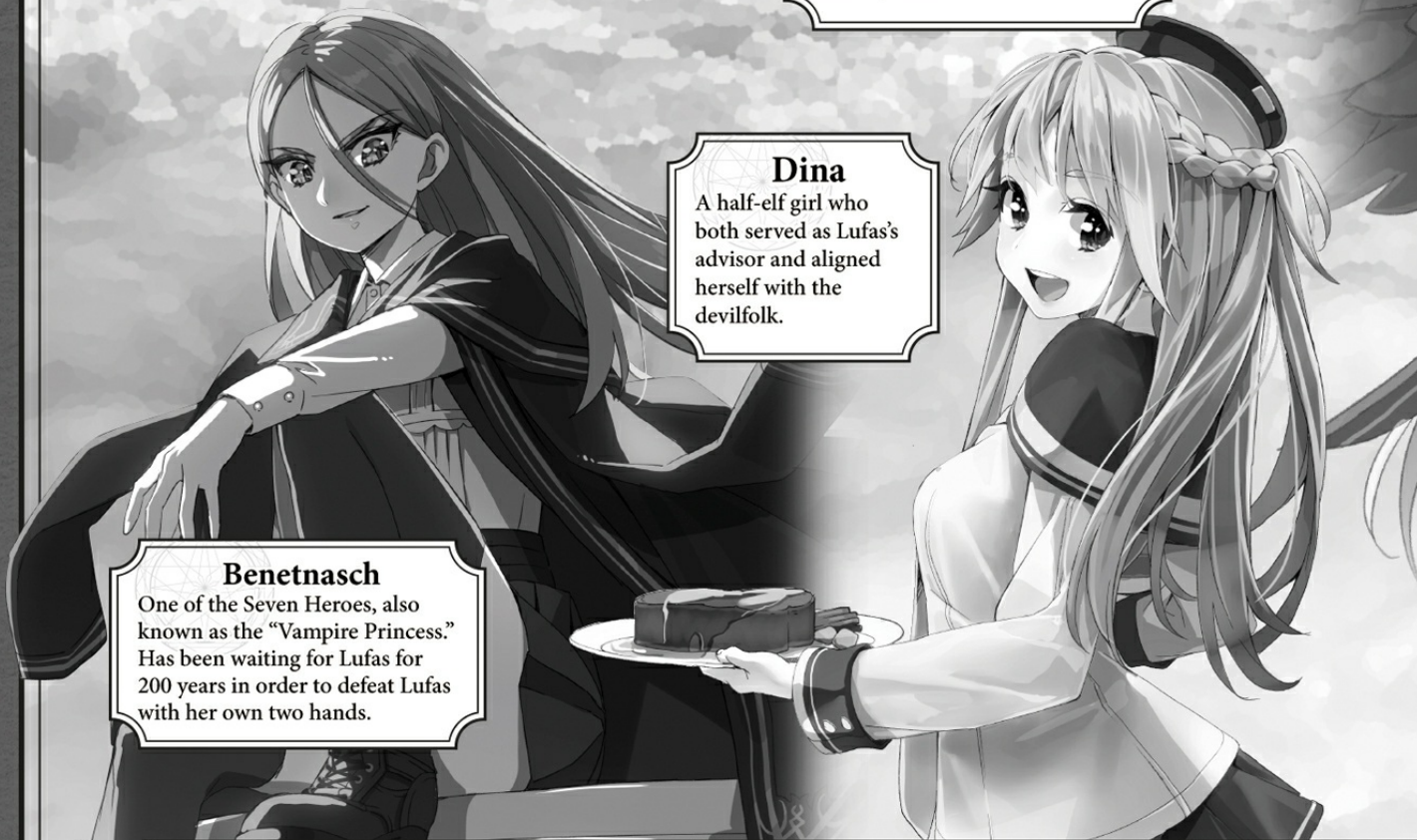
Luna

One of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries. Her attribute is Moon.



Minamijuuji Sei

The hero who was summoned from modern Japan. He's a normal, average boy except for his honest, straightforward attitude and strong sense of justice.



Dina

A half-elf girl who both served as Lufas's advisor and aligned herself with the devilfolk.

Benetnasch

One of the Seven Heroes, also known as the "Vampire Princess." Has been waiting for Lufas for 200 years in order to defeat Lufas with her own two hands.



Lion King Leon

Once the Lion constellation of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, Leon is a nemean lion. After his defeat at the hands of Aries and the others, he left without rejoining the Twelve Heavenly Stars.



Taurus the Ox

One of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars. The only member out of all of them to be treated as a friend rather than a subordinate.

STORY RECAP:

Having possessed the body of my in-game character, Lufas Maphaahl, I brought my group to the country of the demihumans after hearing that Leon the Lion was inciting them all towards war.

However, along the way, I reunited with Benetnasch, one of the Seven Heroes. In order to grant her wish to fight me, something which she had been waiting 200 years for, I traveled alone to the vampire country of Mjolnir. There, I awoke to Lufas's true power in the middle of my fight to the death against Benetnasch, and I won.

As for the others, the members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars continued on to the demihuman country after separating from me. However, they were all pushed to the brink by the overwhelming might of Leon the Lion, who had once been hailed as the strongest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars.

But the other Twelve Stars had also regained their powers in concert with my awakening. Aries, who had become the lynchpin of the attack on Leon, reacted to the will of his comrades and swung his fist at Leon. In doing so, he reduced Leon's massive HP pool to 1 in a single strike, defeating Leon.



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1

The fairy paradise Alfheim was an inviolable sanctuary in the form of a large forest where spirits and fairies lived. The Fairy Princess, Pollux, was called the symbol of light for Mizgarz, but she was also said to be a representative of the Goddess. In fact, she had given guidance to many chosen ones and heroes, stretching far back into the ancient past, and it had even been recorded that she sometimes granted them legendary weapons.

Even the Devil King couldn't put his hands on Alfheim easily, but it currently played host to an unwanted guest. The guest was a young man wearing a mantle and white armor who, at first glance, might have seemed like a hero—Terra. The prince of the devilfolk had penetrated deep into the forest and was facing off with one half of the Twins of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, the Fairy Princess, Pollux.

She was a fairy, but her form basically couldn't be differentiated from a human's. She wore a headband over her honey-colored hair, and she had on a tricolor dress. Yet anyone who saw her could sense a mysterious, otherworldly air about her.

Terra, the prince of the devilfolk, was a life-form comprised of mana, while the leader of the fairies, Pollux, was a life-form comprised of divine power. Normally, they could easily be described as natural enemies, but Terra held no animosity for her. In fact, he respected the great leader of light and hadn't come this far to make an enemy of her. He only wanted to learn how to create an avatar and use said power to free a woman from the terrible fate of all devilfolk.

On the other hand, Pollux's response was...

"If you win, I won't mind giving you a hint. Though that really just means I have no intention of telling you anything."

This was a clear rejection, and she calmly summoned an army against which Terra had no chance. Pollux's skill, Argonautai, could summon heroic spirits

from the past, giving them temporary physical bodies. It was an almost godlike ability.

Race did not matter. As long as she recognized the individual as a hero, she could then bring them back, even if they were monsters. She summoned humans, vampires, heaven-winged, elves, dwarves, halflings, and beastfolk. On top of all that, she also brought back bug people, merfolk, plant races, snake people, and even members of races that had died out long ago. They all took up their weapons at the same time to protect her. There was no limit on how many people she could call forth; Pollux could continue summoning until she ran out of SP.

Pollux had another special ability as well; she was able to use her sleeping true body to endlessly draw magic and divine power from Mizgarz itself. In short, it was proof that her true body had limitless power, but it was likely that there were very few who could ever deduce her true form.

“Give him a taste of pain. Just enough that he never comes back, okay?” Pollux handed out her orders, and the heroes set off at once.

Terra drew his sword, swiftly sending an attack towards the giant in the lead, but it used its large sword to easily block Terra’s slash and pushed the prince back. Two heaven-winged knights cut in, forcing Terra to quickly attempt a dodge, though he was still served a shallow cut to the shoulder.

“Grk?!”

Terra managed to react, avoiding a lethal blow and impressing Pollux.

“Oh ho... Those are some good reflexes.”

Her voice still held no hint of wariness towards Terra. She was just praising his desperate struggles, as an absolute victor with one hundred percent confidence in her success. It was only a matter of course; there was no reason for her to lose. She’d win even if she went and took a nap.

It was like playing chess when her side of the board was filled with queens, knights, and other powerful pieces surrounding the other side, which only had a king. What was there to be cautious of? Not to mention the fact that she had several heroes who were stronger than Terra too.

In order to turn this situation around, the king would have to be so ridiculously strong it could flip the entire chessboard. Pollux knew of one such ridiculous king who had forced her to admit defeat in the past, but unfortunately, she was on a completely different level than Terra. In the end, this was checkmate; the fight was over before it had started.

“Just give up and leave already. I don’t really make it a hobby to bully the weak.”

“Isn’t it a bit early to be acting like you’ve already won?”

“Is it? Then go ahead and continue your useless struggle as long as you like.”

A giant stepped forward and swung its club at Terra. The prince of the devilfolk had definitely put his guard up in time, but he was simply blown away, guard still up, due to the giant’s ridiculous strength.

Several types of beastfolk were waiting at the place Terra was flying towards, and they all attacked the prince at once. Terra barely managed to avoid those attacks, but he was gradually becoming more and more wounded, unable to find any room to counterattack.

Terra backed up, making some room to swing his sword, and threw a blue slash outwards. However, his attack was unable to defeat even one enemy; it was completely blocked by several shields that had appeared in its way. On top of that, his attack was returned several times over with spells of all elements, several of them even canceling each other out as others hit Terra.

“Gak! Grrrrr!”

It was hard to say that the argonautai’s teamwork was good. In fact, they were so scattered you could say it was downright bad. Each one acted alone while attacking Terra, which was the reason why he was barely managing to stay in the fight.

If Castor were around, he would have been able to gather the heroes into one force, one army. However, Pollux was unable to do that as she held no combat ability herself, since she never set foot on the battlefield. Even though she had an unfair ability to endlessly create fighters, she was only able to call them forth. She didn’t have the ability to use them properly. In other words, she

wasn't able to make full use of her own skills.

In fact, the huge numbers of heroes she'd summoned caused them to get in each other's way, greatly lowering each of their respective power levels. There were even some instances of them moving in front of one another, resulting in friendly fire.

However, that didn't mean Terra could win. No matter how scattered and leaderless they were, their individual power levels were still all in the top bracket of the entirety of Mizgarz. Just having all these heroes that Terra might not even be able to beat one-on-one band together to attack him represented an unbelievable threat. Even if he managed to defeat one or two, Pollux would simply resummon them immediately. Their numbers were essentially infinite as long as he didn't do something about her. That being said, they were so numerous he couldn't even get close.

And her skills were still even more unfair.

"I'll take the liberty of pushing you over the edge. Heroes, give your lives to become the cornerstones of victory!"

Several members with the Chosen class responded to Pollux's order. They weren't from two hundred years ago. They were far older, most likely from thousands or even tens of thousands of years before. Having received the order, they didn't hesitate to give their lives to activate the skill Soul Succession. It was one of the skills of the Chosen class, and it created a permanent barrier that both buffed allies and debuffed enemies. However, such a powerful effect had a correspondingly high cost, requiring the user's life.

The Chosen in the crowd activated this skill with no hesitation at all, disappearing into motes of light. At the same time, all the argonautai became noticeably stronger while Terra had his stats suddenly lowered until he was the equivalent of being level 200. Even then, the nightmare still wasn't over.

"Gather, dead souls, to mine side. Return to the dance, my precious children!"

Pollux once again activated her skill, and in doing so, she returned to life the heroes who had literally just given up their lives. This was the most unreasonable part of the argonautai—their ability to infinitely resurrect. To

these heroic spirits, huge costs like that of the user's life were of no consequence. After all, they were already dead, and as long as Pollux was around, they could come back as many times as was required.

Even one casting of Soul Succession was peerlessly powerful. Having multiple instances of it overlapping boosted the heroes' stats over what would be normal for level 1000. Going by stats alone, all of them were now in the same class as the Seven Heroes in strength.

On the other hand, Terra had been horribly weakened. He was now more frail than the Seven Luminaries, which meant that this fight was basically between several hundred Alioths and one Mars. It wasn't even a real fight anymore.

"Now then, even a toddler would understand that there's no point in fighting anymore... Do you still intend to continue?"

"Of course. I will not give up."

"Fool. This isn't bravery. It's just suicide."

The heroes once again started their fierce attack. This was now just an execution. One side was simply beating on the other, though they were barely toeing the line so Terra wouldn't die. He was punched and kicked and laid low in the dirt miserably before being stomped on and thrown. The victor was now obvious to anyone who had the opportunity to look.

Even so, Terra unrelentingly took up his sword. Sadly, though, his sword couldn't even scratch Pollux's heroes in his weakened state.

Pollux raised her eyebrows seeing him like that, indicating her irritation. "Learn your lesson already. How long are you going to insist on this uselessness?"

"Who knows...? How long do you think?"

Terra acted like he had room to negotiate, but he had no such thing. In fact, he was punched in the face after that show while being told to shut up. It was no longer a fight at this point. It was just a thrashing.

Pollux's expression twisted as she watched the ghastly, one-sided scene. Honestly, it was tough for her. If Terra had been like other devilfolk, and had

talked a big show while looking down at her, she would probably have had no qualms about doing this. If he had been the same kind of person as Leon, then she would have gone so far as to eliminate him. And if he had been like Benetnasch, Pollux would have had to go all-out anyway just to stay alive.

Yet after talking to him, Pollux understood that he wasn't really all that evil. In fact, he was fighting for someone he loved, and that made it really hard for her to keep doing this. His wishes and beliefs were both noble and pure, something Pollux normally loved, and because she wanted to cheer him on, she found it hard to trample all over his goals. She didn't like having to stamp out brave flowers trying their hardest to bloom in this hellish world. If he were some sort of poisonous flower that thought nothing of the trouble it caused to its surroundings, then she wouldn't hesitate to pluck it, but this was honestly impossible for her. Pollux just couldn't get into it.

I truly hate this. I can't even put him to sleep because he's resistant to status effects... Pollux closed her eyes in melancholy as she heaved a sigh, then she turned around on her heel and left the battlefield.

"Anyone with the Blunted-Sword Strike skill, continue to hit him with it until he faints. The rest can stand by. I don't want to incur the wrath of the Devil King, so make sure not to kill him."

Pollux even left behind the armored warrior that she'd had constantly accompanying her as a bodyguard, as she started walking towards the shade of a different tree.

She couldn't stand to watch anymore of this. Pollux derived no joy from massacring someone young with pure, straightforward convictions who acted out of love for someone else, but that also meant she had gone easy on him.

As if they'd been waiting for just such a moment, someone jumped down from a tree, landing behind Pollux and holding a blade to her throat.

Surprised, Pollux couldn't utter a word for a moment.

"Heroic spirits, stop your attack!" ordered Luna, the attacker who had taken Pollux hostage.

She might have sounded calm, but Pollux could feel the blade that was held to

her throat shaking. She stretched to get a look behind her. *It's a boy who's restraining me. No... A girl?* There were tears in the girl's eyes, and her expression was filled with fear and rage, but also grief at being powerless in the face of Terra being beaten up so badly.

Seeing that, Pollux understood instantly. *Ah, I see. So this is the girl Terra wants to protect.*



“Oh ho... So you were waiting all this time for me to leave my bodyguard? How admirable. You’ve certainly managed to take me from behind, but did you think that would lead to your victory? From the looks of you, you’re only around level 300. I’m still level 800, you know, even as weak as I am.”

“That’s true. You’re level 800, and if you had the normal amount of strength for that level, I probably wouldn’t be able to win. But you should have sacrificed almost all of your combat ability to have such peerless skills. Am I wrong?”

“That’s not a bad read, but did you figure that out yourself? Or maybe it’s what the child over there expects? Either way, if you’re wrong, I’ll just counterattack, and you’ll die.” Pollux giggled, showing off a sense of composure befitting her strength.

Seeing that, Luna’s hand trembled for a moment but no more than that. It wasn’t that she didn’t understand the hopeless gap between level 300 and level 800. Her last encounter with Aigokeros had left enough of an impression to have her still tossing and turning in her sleep. If Pollux had strength befitting her level, then it would be as if Luna were pointing her blade at another terrifying Aigokeros, and that was simply suicide. Just as Pollux said, Luna would simply be counterattacked and turned into mincemeat before she could do anything, but even after realizing that, she didn’t pull back.

“This is what Sir Terra thinks, and I believe him more than you.”

“I see... Then what will you do if I refuse to cooperate? That child’s plan won’t work if I don’t help, which means I already know I won’t be killed. I could just decide to be obstinate.”

“In that case, I’ll just kill you on my own. I can’t allow Sir Terra to be killed.”

Pollux gave a silent look to both Luna and Terra and found herself subconsciously smiling after seeing the strength of their bond. At the same time, she had a thought. *What unfortunate children. If only they hadn’t been born as devilfolk, they wouldn’t have to suffer so. At any rate, it looks like this match is settled.*

Pollux raised both her hands, signaling her surrender. “Okay, I surrender. As you already expect, I only have the combat ability of any normal adventurer.

Stop attacking, argonautai, and heal him.”

So he won thanks to his persistent tactics, Pollux thought, feeling weirdly happy. With strong people like him around, maybe the devilfolk aren't as hopeless as I thought.

With that, Pollux's view of the future grew a little brighter.

2

In the Fairy Princess's estate, located deep in Alfheim, Terra, Luna, and Pollux sat opposite each other at a table now that the fight was over. Pollux had her fairy servants serve some tea, before turning to the two of them with a serious expression.

“Now then... I believe learning the method of making an avatar was your goal? Or should I say, you want a body that is not that of a devilfolk in order to escape your fate?”

“Yes, exactly. At the moment, we basically do not have our own will, whether we fight Lufas Maphaahl or take another route.”

The devilfolk were bound by fate. Neither Terra nor Luna knew much about it, and Venus, who probably did, was no longer around. Well, even if she were around, she probably wouldn't have said anything about it. The other person who might have known was Terra's father, the Devil King, but Terra no longer trusted him.

That was because, if what Terra suspected was correct, the Devil King wasn't a devilfolk. In fact, he was a holy existence—the complete opposite. Basically, the Devil King was nothing more than another actor that the Goddess had prepared to liven up the stage, and the devilfolk were puppets made to be his pawns.

To Terra, this wasn't a leap of the imagination. Aigokeros had used the words “fakes created to imitate demons” and “pets of divinity.” Then there was the fact that the devilfolk died if they didn't kill humans, and when they themselves

died, they broke down into mana. Venus had also used the word “puppets,” and that meant something as well. All of that together meant it was harder to turn away from the truth, and that truth was that the devilfolk were all just a magic spell of the Goddess, forced to take on the role of opposing humanity.

Just why had the Goddess done that, and what had she been thinking? Terra had no clue, but the one thing he could say for sure was that the Goddess had no intention of allowing the devilfolk to win. The Goddess had always extended a saving hand to humanity at each point they befell great danger. Sometimes, she would give power to the one hailed as a hero, causing a miraculous change of fortune, but to anyone who knew the truth, the whole thing probably looked idiotic and laughable.

The Goddess was undeniably the one who had birthed the devilfolk and used them to torture humanity, and she used the danger she herself put humanity in to paint herself as a goddess of unconditional love. The Goddess controlled both sides; she was literally starring in her own play. The devilfolk were nothing but puppets forced to act according to her poorly made scenario.

So you... You realized that, did you? And you begged your father to save Luna... Pollux thought.

In the back of his mind, Terra thought of a man who had been his friend. *He... Mercurius surely arrived at the truth faster than anyone else, and in thinking that the only one who could change things was the Devil King, he pushed himself too far. He acted too hastily, and as a result, he headed to Draupnir, almost as if he'd been led there... He was dealt the final blow there after clashing with the hero's party and the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars.*

No, he probably was actually led around...by Venus.

Other than Mercurius, there had also been Jupiter and Mars. With the way things were now, Terra could tell that Venus had constructed a road to the star of death, Lufas, and led them there. Having realized that truth as well as the wish of his friend, Terra could no longer sit by and do nothing. The leader of the devilfolk was no longer their ally. In fact, he never had been their ally. As things stood, there was no way for Luna to survive. Now that Lufas Maphaahl was back, the devilfolk would eventually be eradicated. Luna needed to become

something other than a devilfolk in order to be saved.

However, Luna had started to realize the fate of all devilfolk as well, and she was hoping to at least save Terra, though he himself hadn't realized that. In the end, they were rather similar.

"I'll start from the conclusion. The method of creating avatars which the two of you so want... I cannot teach it to you."

Terra only stared at Pollux, shocked.

"Rather, I don't know it. It's true that I can use divine power to create avatars and have the souls of the dead possess them so they are artificially resurrected, but I've never heard of devilfolk, who are beings made of magic, being able to change into fairies. It's completely unprecedented. We are heaven-arts, and you are magic. As you two know, heaven-arts and magic oppose each other. To be honest, it's never even been tried."

Because divine power opposed magic, it tended to reflect or bounce away magic power. For example, a shield created by heaven-arts used this property. It could also be used to boost the power of anything that was not powered by or made of magic. The principles behind this were either healing or strengthening skills, but basically, while magic was a power that created something that didn't exist, heaven-arts was a power that strengthened something that already existed. The vectors of these powers were completely different in the first place.

"I could have the two of you die so you could be resurrected through me, but..." Pollux hesitated. "I don't even know if that's possible."

"May I ask you why?"

"It's cruel, but..." she trailed off. "There is a real possibility that you two don't have souls in the first place."

After hearing the words that came out of Pollux's mouth, Luna's shoulders shook.

"Since we fairies are originally plants, we have something that could be considered souls with our main bodies. Rather, we cut off a part of our soul to inhabit our avatar. When it comes to you devilfolk though..."

Terra paused before finishing her thought. “We were made from nothing, huh?”

“Exactly. For example, spells like Fireball or Aqua Blast don’t have souls, right? You have egos and self-awareness, so you may have souls. But you also may not, and if you don’t... Well, I can’t summon something that doesn’t exist, no matter how much I want to. Heaven-arts is a power that ‘affects what already exists.’” Pollux paused for a moment, considering the possibilities. “My Argonautai simply takes souls which already exist and strengthens them, giving them physical form... It cannot make something appear from nothing.”

Having heard Pollux’s explanation, Terra bit his lips. He had come fully prepared to accept the truth, and he’d sworn to his dead friend to save Luna no matter what the truth was. *But... But like this, I can’t see any hope...*

It didn’t matter how willing Terra was to save Luna. He couldn’t find a path towards that goal.

“But,” Pollux continued, “it’s never been tried, so that doesn’t mean it’s definitely impossible.”

Terra gasped. “Th-That means...!”

“I’m talking about reincarnating a devilfolk as a fairy. Sounds interesting, doesn’t it? I can’t promise you anything, but I’ll look into it on my end as well.”

“Thank you!”

Pollux smiled gently, and Terra couldn’t stop himself from standing up and gripping her hand. Behind him, Luna seemed none too pleased, but as one might have expected, it went unnoticed.

The Fairy Princess will help... There’s nothing more reassuring right now.

Of course, she was a member of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, so if they were to ever make an enemy of Lufas Maphaahl, their helper would turn into an enemy in the blink of an eye. Right now, however, Terra was purely happy about her kindness.

“Uhhh, okay. First, could you let go of my hand? Your cute girlfriend over there is getting jealous,” Pollux said, teasing him.

Luna hurriedly averted her face. Terra also rushed to make excuses, but he was inexperienced in such things. He could only repeat a series of “Uhhh,” “Ummm,” and “That’s not it.”

Seeing this, Pollux burst out into a fit of giggles. *These two really aren’t bad people, are they?* Pollux liked them enough to think, *My lord is rather merciless towards devilfolk, but maybe I can convince her to let just these two go.*

No, wait. If everything’s going as planned, then she should be more peaceful than ever before. I don’t know how much she’s “come back,” but maybe she still has some of that kindness left. At any rate, I don’t know of any way to save these two right now. Which means... There’s no choice but to risk diving into the memories of my “true body.”

Even if Pollux didn’t know, her true body might. However, her thoughts were wiped away in the next instant due to a sudden and intense feeling of pressure, causing her to gasp. *Something’s trying to get inside me! Something immensely powerful that I can’t resist is attempting to control me!*

Pollux knew who it was, and she’d expected that this would happen eventually. *But... To think that it would happen now of all times!*

“Fairy Princess?!”

Pollux struggled for a moment, then stuttered, “R-Run...! Take her and...go...now! Leave Alfheim...!”

“But...”

“Hurry! Before I... Before the Goddess fully takes control! If I stop being myself, I won’t take it easy on you next time!”

“Sorry!”

Seeing Pollux look so desperate, Terra immediately understood that things were serious. Though he hesitated for a moment, he still grabbed Luna’s hand and left in short order.

In truth, he didn’t want to leave Pollux there, and he felt ashamed of his deplorable actions, but if he had to fight Pollux while she wasn’t holding back, he wouldn’t be able to protect Luna. As soon as he’d realized that, Terra

retreated as fast as he could.

While watching Terra's back grow smaller and smaller, Pollux's mouth twisted cynically.

"To move me...who carries part of this world's balance on her shoulders... Looks like the Goddess is pretty cornered. That's probably proof that things are going just as Miss Lufas planned... But I honestly don't know if I should be happy about that. Still, all this has already been predicted... It's all going according to plan." She paused. "The timing is just awful though."

Pollux laughed as she felt her soul forcibly being nudged towards sleep. *If the Goddess really wants to use this body, then... Fine. I'll let her. But in exchange, her field of view will narrow.*

It wasn't widely known, but the Goddess was not all-seeing. In fact, it was the opposite. Her point of view was so wide it limited her. For example, imagine a model of the whole of Mizgarz, populated by little models of all the towns and with people in them moving as they were in real life. Could you see everything everybody was doing? No, it would be impossible. Everything would be too small, and your point of view would be too zoomed out.

That was the relationship the Goddess had with Mizgarz. The way she normally saw the world was like someone looking through a magnifying glass or microscope. That was why she couldn't see everything at once. It was also why she made puppets, or avatars, to be her arms and legs and to take action in her place. Since the scale of existence was too different, the Goddess was unable to grasp the goings-on at such a small scale, and it actually proved to be a point of difficulty.

The Goddess had ways of fixing that though. She could possess (or log in) to her own avatar or puppets and see the world through their eyes. Pollux was not the Goddess's avatar, but she was something close to it. Or rather, her true body was close to it.

Pollux was already independent of her true body, as a fairy with her own personality, but it was possible for the Goddess to force her way in. Of course, Pollux could hold on for a little while if she were to try to resist, but she decided not to do that. Even if she resisted, it wouldn't change the final result, and there

was merit to giving in quickly.

If she were to allow the Goddess to “log in,” the Goddess’s point of view would be narrowed to that of a normal person. In other words, while Pollux was being controlled, her master’s actions would become a mystery to the Goddess. This was kind of a double-edged sword for the Goddess. In exchange for gaining the power of Pollux, Lufas would temporarily be allowed to move freely.

“The rest is up to Miss Lufas... There’s no way I’ll die, but I might have to be prepared to be down an arm or something next time I wake up...”

I’ll hand you my body, but not my memories. Pollux willed her memories sealed in her soul, making it so the Goddess wouldn’t be able to peek at a single one of them.

There’s no way to tell how much of what I know is even true though. Like how I was ordered to give Castor the Key to Reach the Heavens. Was that the real thing? Because if it was...the Devil King could have saved Terra and Luna long ago...

“Grk?! Ah-AAAAGGGGGHHH!”

Pollux’s thoughts were stopped there. Her consciousness was quickly wiped away, and she could feel the horrible sensation of becoming something other than herself.

Miss Lufas... Bro...ther...

Then, Pollux turned into light and disappeared.

3

“Master, was it really all right to leave Leon like that?”

“Yeah. Just let him cool off for a while.”

I’d rendered Leon harmless by binding him with magic chains, so we just left him like that there in the charred remains of what had once been the demihumans’ settlement. Photon Chain’s effect rendered a single target

incapable of moving for a certain period of time, thus raising the chances of hitting that target to one hundred percent for that duration. However, it seemed like the chains here were different from the game, in that they would last indefinitely until I either dispelled them or the target managed to free itself. Not to mention the fact that most boss-class enemies in the game were immune to the spell anyway.

Still, Leon should be able to free himself after recovering for a while, so leaving him there would be fine.

At the moment, we were traveling together, Tanaka and Suzuki running parallel. Our next destination was Alfheim. There was no choice but to leave Leon alone for now. Forcing Leon to return to the fold immediately would just cause trouble, but it was still a waste to kill a possible source of military strength.

I could have used force to make him submit, but doing so would have lowered his level from 1000 to 800, getting rid of the boss monster status he'd just gotten back. Of course, his incredible 1,500,000 HP stat would also drop dramatically. *If I remember correctly, Leon's HP in the game after capturing him was...250,000?* It was surprisingly high for a tamed level 800 monster, but in the end, it was still clearly inferior to boss stats.

It was only natural in terms of game balance, but it still didn't feel good. In some senses, though, this was standard for an RPG. It happened a lot where an enemy had HP in the tens or hundreds of thousands, but as soon as they became an ally, they had only a few thousand HP and paper-thin defenses.

Anyway, I thought it'd be a huge waste to kill Leon. I really couldn't justify killing Leon and throwing away potential firepower, especially since we were about to start a fight with the goddess. That was why I had decided to follow my feelings of hesitation and resistance, leaving him as a level 1000 boss to try to get him to do what I wanted while keeping his stats. I'd only talked to him a little, but he seemed to be a simple man, and if I were to treat him properly, I felt like I'd be able to get him to fight with us in the confrontation with the Devil King.

"So then, what's the plan now?"

“First, we head to Alfheim as planned. We’re meeting up with Pollux. By the way, there’s also the possibility of going to Helheim...”

The plan was to head to Alfheim next and meet up with the Fairy Princess, Pollux, the other half of Gemini of the Twelve Heavenly Stars who was sealing the Ouroboros of Wood.

Though on that front, another ouroboros was being sealed in Muspelheim, which was completely outside the human sphere of influence and would require stepping foot into devilfolk territory. We would have to go there eventually, but I wanted to wait to do so until we’d gathered up more power. No matter how weak the devilfolk were compared to us, it’d still be too much trouble if they tried to throw tens or hundreds of thousands of bodies at us.

Taurus had appeared near here, and he was supposed to have been in Helheim, so the entrance was probably somewhere nearby. Though, there probably wouldn’t be any point in going now. First, since he had the role of sealing an ouroboros, he probably wouldn’t move, even if we asked, unless we had prepared some sort of replacement. However, there was no one among us who could serve that role at the moment. The people who were knowledgeable about seals and sealing were Aigokeros, Dina, and Sagittarius. Aigokeros couldn’t be trusted to not just wake the thing up, though, and I had no idea what Dina would do. We’d just regrouped with Sagittarius too, so exchanging him for Taurus so quickly didn’t feel proper. That was why recovering Pollux, who could summon a heroic spirit to take Taurus’s place, came first.

Not to mention Taurus’s last words: “Come see me after everything is over.” That probably implied, “don’t come right now,” and if I were to pop up cheekily, he might decide that I wasn’t the real Lufas after all and come swinging.

But more than all of that, Dina was really, *really* against it.

“No, never! I’m not going! Let’s just leave that thing there! We can just make him a character with no screen time until everything’s over and the ending credits are rolling!”

I had a feeling that if I tried to force us to go to Helheim, she’d just run away using Exgate and never come back, so it was probably best to leave him for later. Not to mention the fact that we had the hero’s party with us, and I’d feel

too sorry for them if we were to drag them to Hel with us all of a sudden. Rather, at their level, they'd be killed by even the most basic of mook demons that appeared there.

This was just game knowledge, but the demons that appeared in Helheim were level 200 at minimum. It was a high-difficulty dungeon that fundamentally did not allow for beginners. There were several weirdos who played with restrictions and charged into the dungeon with levels only in the double digits anyway, but I didn't want to force these people to try that.

They and the kid, Sei, had all come with us this far against the demihumans, but they weren't truly part of the party. The proper thing to do was to first see them to a nearby town or something.

I paused, thinking. *Pollux, huh?*

In the game, she always came with Castor, and they were named "Fairy Siblings," so I didn't actually know how she was in battle by herself. Well, there was no data on her in the first place, just Castor. In the game, Pollux only floated around nearby, and even if you attacked her, she didn't take any damage. She did have a hitbox, though, so it was possible to attack her. It was just that, if you hit her, Castor was the one to take damage for some reason. Though she would occasionally use heaven-arts to support Castor, she was kind of like an option or bit you saw in shmups.

I suppose the truly scary thing about her was her summoning ability. Surprisingly, *Exgate Online* differed from other MMOs in that there wasn't any sort of summoning class or ability system. It wasn't possible to summon phantasmal or magical beasts from nothing. The devs had probably decided it wasn't needed because it would overlap with the Monster Tamer and Alchemist classes.

However, Pollux was the only individual able to summon. From the start of battle, she would continue to refill the enemy's ranks in the form of summoning more fighters at regular intervals. Well, to be blunt, she was basically just like those enemies you see so often in games that go "XX called in friends!" But in the games, it simply said the fighters were summoned. Apparently she was summoning the spirits of dead heroes, or einherjars.

Of course, that ability somehow got worse once she was a friendly; it changed from a skill to increase the number of allies to summoning an armored man for a moment to attack. It had been a huge letdown to my friends and me at the time, and it was worse now because the summoned spirits always dutifully left after attacking.

Like, why? When she was an enemy, they stayed indefinitely!

Anyway, Castor, who was considered the main body, was already with us... Pollux, who was like an add-on, was on her own. *I wonder if that's really okay? Honestly, she seems mega weak...*

"Dina, are there any suitable villages or towns on the way to Alfheim? We'd like to drop the hero's party off there."

"Then how about the martial city of Laegjarn, Miss Lufas? The population is large, and they shouldn't have trouble returning to their journey from there using wyvern carriages."

"What kind of place is it?"

"Laevateinn is split into four territories named the territories of the sword, spear, shield, and bow. Laegjarn is considered to be the center of the territory of the spear. One of the heroes who betrayed you along with Alioth became its first lord, Miss Lufas, and it's been passed down to his descendants ever since. If memory serves, the lordship of the spear currently belongs to the Spess noble family."

"If it is your order, master, I can use Brachium to clean up that filth. Should I?"

"You needn't do that. Are you seriously suggesting I drop off the hero's party in the middle of a scorched field?" I reprimanded Libra, who had butted in while Dina was talking, before heaving a sigh.

Why does she always go straight to decimating the other party? She should be the highest level of AI at 5, but these tendencies make me want to cry.

Still, a territory of Laevateinn, huh...? So we returned at some point.

The amount of livable land for humans was small, so it might have been only natural, but it seemed that we'd made a circle around the entire area. I had left

Laevateinn, then had gone to Svel, and then my grave before I had arrived in Gjallarhorn. From there, we had stopped by Vanaheim, then Blutgang. After that, there had been Draupnir, then Tyrving, though I'd stopped by Mjolnir before that. And now, we were heading back to Laevateinn, which meant that I'd seen pretty much all of humanity's territory.

In my opinion, this had happened really fast, but in terms of size, it was just like we'd taken a tour around Japan in a car. Of course it'd be quick.

"So, what kind of place is it?"

"Right. First, it is well stocked with facilities and services of all kinds, and the places that stock equipment for warriors and knights are of exceptionally high quality."

Libra and Scorpius both responded to Dina's statement with scathing criticism.

"Did you mean: low quality?"

"You meant to say trash, didn't you?"

Well, that's probably true at our level, but I'm willing to bet it's the limit of what this era is able to achieve. Also, I'm not sure you two should be judging the products before even seeing them. Isn't there an off chance that they're actually quite good?

"Also, they hold a martial arts tournament once a year, which serves as a way to advertise a person's skills. It's a perfect place for a protagonist in the fantasy genre to test their skills. Would you like to try?"

"You want us to kill the other participants?"

To repeat myself for the umpteenth time, the average level of this era had lowered significantly. *Given how the Sword Saint, who's said to be the world's strongest, is at the level he is, even surpassing level 100 must be pretty rare.* In our current state, we were like people from an RPG where the maximum level was 1000 who had forced their way into a fantasy world where the maximum level was 99. The stages we stood on were just fundamentally different. Even if I didn't want to kill them, I could blow off their heads with only an unrestrained forehead flick. That was how large the gap in power was.

Of course, if I were to fight, I would use the Blunted-Sword Strike skill. However, if I accidentally forgot to use it even once, then things would end in murder, and I didn't want to do that. *Oh, and this reaction's a little late, but... Huh, so the Sword Saint's a tiger. Yeah, uh...* I had seen him already back in Draupnir, but... Look, I dunno why, but he ran away in terror every time he saw me, so I couldn't tell he was a Sword Saint at all. I only thought that he was a really huge, cowardly cat. *Sorry, Sword Saint.*

At any rate...

"What's wrong, Sagittarius? You've been rather quiet."

Sagittarius was silent a moment longer, then eventually said, "No, it's nothing. I just don't believe I'm qualified to take part in this conversation..."

"Don't worry about the past so much. That part's already over," I said.

I moved towards Sagittarius, who was currently making himself as small as he could in the corner. He hadn't even turned into his human form, instead sitting down in his large centaur form. *It looks really cramped.*

"If you still can't forgive yourself, simply contribute enough in future battles to make up for it. We expect much from your skills with the bow. Understood?"

Seriously. Libra could also snipe things from afar, but having two people capable of sniping wasn't a bad thing. Not to mention the fact that his range was even larger than Libra's, and he was one hundred percent accurate. He could even use his skills as a jank teleport ability, so depending on how it was used, he could be incredibly useful. More than anything, Sagittarius had common sense. That alone was enough to make him endlessly valuable.

"Lady Lufas..."

"Now then, how long do you intend to stay all cramped like that? You can take human form, can't you?"

In Sagittarius's case, only his bottom half changed since his upper half was already human, but it still should have been better than dealing with his horse bottom half the entire time.

As soon as I said that, he showed me a small smile before nodding.

“Yes, Lady Lufas. Just wait a—”

Karkinos seemed to have noticed something and hurried to stop Sagittarius, but I didn't understand why.

In front of my eyes, Sagittarius's horse half gave off light before he eventually settled into human form. Karkinos, acting fast, covered Virgo's eyes and made her face the other way. *Just what's he so...* I thought, but the next instant, I understood. After all, I was face-to-face with the lower half of a naked, flashing pervert.

I could only stare in shocked silence.

“Oh... I tried to stop you...”

Sagittarius's symbol of manhood hung freely between his legs. Luckily, Dina reacted quickly and cast water magic, so it appeared to be mosaicked under a veil of mist and I couldn't see it directly, but it was still awful. And it was huge. The worst part was that Sagittarius himself didn't seem to mind at all; he was being quite bold about it. He showed absolutely no intention of hiding it whatsoever.

“Transformation...complete.”

For some reason, Sagittarius looked really smug as Scorpius's fist buried itself into his face.

“Gwoargh?! What're you doing?!”

“Are you an idiot?! How dare you flaunt that filthy thing in front of Lady Lufas! Put something on right now, or I'll cut it off!!!”

“What? But I'm always like this.”

“Don't treat your horse and human forms the same!”

As one might've expected, I was in shock due to the overwhelming situation, but Sagittarius's explanation was strangely understandable. *I see... So that's how it is.* As soon as he mentioned it, I realized, *He's right. He really does go full Pooh Bear usually!* Even as a centaur, his horse half was unadorned, even though he wore a robe on his upper half.

Now that I thought about it, Aries had also been naked the first time he'd

taken human form, though Dina had quickly covered him up. In comparison, Aigokeros, Scorpius, Karkinos, and Leon were all pretty on top of their appearances. They had prepared their own clothing beforehand, after all. Still, Sagittarius had always been half-human, so he seemed to have a half-assed conception of “clothe the upper part but not the lower part.”

“No need to worry. It doesn’t bother me,” Sagittarius said without expression.

That didn’t stop Scorpius from angrily kicking him in the crotch though.

“It bothers us, you incorrigible idiot!”

Sagittarius groaned in pain and surprise, balled up while cradling his man-parts, and Scorpius looked down on him like he was a filthy lump.

Uh, yeah... Uhhh... Please don’t do that. It hurts. A lot.

Still, I never would have pegged Sagittarius as a half-nudist. Even though I thought another well-adjusted person had finally joined, he turned out to be another weirdo. *Just what is wrong with the Twelve Stars?*

Anyway, I should just transmute some pants and underwear for now.

4

A day had passed since leaving the demihuman village. We’d arrived at the martial city of Laegjarn, a pit stop on the way to our objective, Alfheim.

“Oh ho...”

“It’s the picture of an RPG town, isn’t it?”

We looked at Laegjarn in wonder. The scene reflected in my eyes was exactly that of a traditional RPG town. The buildings, which enclosed stone-paved streets, all featured uniform red roofs, windows decorated with flowers, and walls of mainly yellow or white. The city was very well adorned and gorgeous, contrary to the stern and rugged impression the title “martial city” gave off.

The city wasn’t surrounded by a huge lake, nor was it built into the side of a mountain. It was also neither perpetually night nor actually a giant moving

golem. It wasn't just a collection of tents on a plain either. It was the very picture of a standard fantasy townscape.

The streets were host to carriages, and many people came and went. The clothes they wore also fit the RPG aesthetic. There were no old dudes in work clothes or suspicious fake angels in cloaks.

The women wore blouses and skirts with aprons over them, the designs close to the German dirndl. Meanwhile, men wore leather pants with suspenders resembling German lederhosen. They'd probably ended up with that style due to prizing durability and stain-resistance, since they expected to wear those clothes for hard labor. Of course, hard physical labor was much more common than desk work in this world, which was undeveloped and backwards compared to Earth. There were also people who clearly were not civilians though. Mercenaries and adventurers were mixed into the crowd, walking around wearing swords with no one batting an eye.

Yeah, this is nice. Totally feels like fantasy.

"Okay then. This should be far enough."

"Sure is. Thanks, Lufas," Gantz replied, cheerful.

Even after finding out who I was, he'd never changed a bit when interacting with me. He'd never stopped being just a well-mannered guy. On the other hand, the tiger and elf guy always seemed to be on pins and needles whenever I so much as looked at them. I genuinely felt sorry for them.

The hero's party generally reacted to me in one of three ways: they were either friendly, scared shitless, or indifferent. Sei, Gantz, and Jean were in the first category. Kross, the tiger, and the cat were in the second. The gorilla was probably indifferent; she didn't seem particularly friendly or scared.

I paused, thinking. *Ah, wait. That's not correct.* Those three weren't the only ones scared of me. The fourth entrant into that category, who had just recently joined the hero's party, got off of Suzuki.

"Golems are amazing, aren't they? I never expected to be passing through the border this quickly."

The one who came down had his whole body covered in white, loose-fitting

clothing with a turban covering their head and a cloth face covering to top it all off. He looked just as suspicious as I did. Of course, all of us knew why things were like this. It was because the late joiner was none other than the spider man who used to be one of the demihuman leaders under Leon.

I don't know exactly what happened, but apparently, the kid, Sei, had tried to protect Sargess when Scorpius was going to kill him. That was why he was alive right now. The spider man had felt indebted to the kid, and with his infinitely strong sense of duty, he'd asked to join them. This was probably something only Sei could have pulled off with his charisma.

I considered him silently. *Still though...*

"You do not seem like a hero at all."

Sei's shoulders drooped, and he remained quiet for a moment, but that was only natural. "I know."

I mean, what is up with his party? From mercenaries to rough-and-tumble adventurers to a tiger, a gorilla, a cat, a dog, and even a spider now... *How chaotic can you get?* The only regular, reasonable people were Kross and the kid, Sei.

"What will you all be doing now?"

"We'll go sightseeing around town a little before resuming the journey to Alfheim."

To be honest, the plan had been to get to Alfheim as fast as possible, but I decided to change the schedule. *Let's stroll around for a little while.* It was the most RPG-like place I'd seen since coming here, so I felt it was sort of a waste to just leave. I didn't have any pressing, time-sensitive things to do at the moment, so taking it easy for a day didn't sound bad, especially since it would give us time to catch up with each other. It might also serve as a good way for Sagittarius to clear away the dark clouds around him.

"Libra, find the best inn in this town."

"Understood."

Honestly, we had plenty of money. Dina had been selling the excessive

amount of orc meat I'd gotten early on as well as the swords and spears and stuff that I'd just randomly made using alchemy (though apparently they were very strong in this day and age), so we were very well off. We always traveled in Tanaka, so there were no fees for using coach services or anything similar. The money kept piling up.

"Also, Sei, We have something to give to you," I said, snapping my fingers.

When I did so, Aigokeros moved to my side as if he'd been waiting for my signal and handed me a wrapped package. To be honest, it wasn't anything that warranted such a big show; it was basically something I'd just made offhand during the journey, but it still should have been much better than what normally went on the market.

I undid the wrapping and revealed a katana. Apparently Scorpius had broken the katana that Sei had been using, so I figured this would be something like compensation. It was made out of Mizar steel as well as a mana crystal that Aries had picked up somewhere. Thus, it had fairly high attack power as well as better-than-nothing magic support capabilities. On top of that, I put a little of my mana into the crystal, so he'd be able to cast small, lower-level Sun element magic without any expenditure. Though it sounds kind of bad, the sword was basically a jack-of-all-trades, master of none. Anyway, it was probably perfect for someone low-level like Sei.

"It's compensation for the sword Scorpius broke. Think of it as a parting gift."

"Huh? I-Is it really okay to take this? We have enough money to buy a new weapon ourselves..."

"No need to worry. Our subordinate was the one who broke your sword, so let us take responsibility."

I handed the katana to the kid before realizing that I'd never given it a name. *A name isn't really necessary, but one would make it cooler...*

"Its name is... Well, it's a katana, so a Japanese name would be best... Okay, this one's name is Kouen."

The name Kouen represented solar prominences, a phenomenon where the sun's gases erupt, extending out and often forming a ring. The katana's abilities

didn't quite match up to its name, but weapon names were best when they were a little overblown. Not to mention that this was a weapon for the hero. It'd be better to have the name be a little flashier in that respect too.

Sei extended his hand out fearfully and took the katana. Gantz, seeing his timidity, laughed and said, "You made a huge profit, didn't you?"

"Good for you, Sei. I don't know how many millions a Lufas Maphaahl weapon would go for."

"Heh! Well it still doesn't hold a candle to my Lucifer Blade Excellion Ω!"

Lucifer Blade Excellion Ω...?! Wait, isn't that the weapon with a ridiculously overblown name that I made on a lark?! Surprisingly, its effect was only +150 attack power and nothing else. To think that something like that was actually left in my grave, and Jean actually thinks it's a strong sword... Sorry, Jean. That thing's seriously, ridiculously weak.

"A-Anyway. We should be going."

I really wanted to leave, so I quickly made to escape. *How should I explain this...?* It was like seeing a grown man getting excited and making a big deal over a sword keychain in a place that sold souvenirs, and I had been the one who'd made that keychain.

While listening to the footsteps of my comrades following after me, I considered making something for Jean next.

* *

As Lufas's party disappeared into the distance, Sei heaved a sigh. The reason Sei had gone out of his way to see Lufas had been to decide the path he should take as well as understand who she was as a person, which he'd accomplished. Though the demihuman incident had happened during that time and had made everything more complicated, everything had been resolved in a decent manner in the end. All Sei had to do was use Megrez's golem to send him a letter. However, Sei was still unable to find the answer he wanted within himself.

Lufas was definitely not a bad person or a danger to the world. For a while, Sei had decided to join forces with her. Her subordinates were different from

her though. Things were fine when Lufas was controlling those like Scorpius and Aigokeros, but when she wasn't around, it was very possible they could turn their fangs on humanity.

Yes. In the past, what the people had feared wasn't Lufas herself; it had been the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars that she'd gathered on a whim that they had feared held the potential to turn into demons. That was why Sei had to think, and why he was wavering. He wondered what was truly correct. He asked himself if the path he was choosing to take was a mistake.

If... If it truly does prove to be a mistake in the end... For an instant, the image of Lufas casting Solar Flare came to mind. Sei imagined her turning her power on humanity and destroying all of Mizgarz. Just having too much power was fearsome in itself.

"What's wrong, Sei? Your face is pale."

"A-Ah, don't worry. I'm fine."

Sei knew the feelings of those past people painfully well. That thought had certainly been scary. Too scary.

When Sei had first come to this world and heard about the Devil King and Lufas, he'd simply taken it as a common fantasy setup. He'd mistakenly imagined their strength to simply be on par with an RPG's final boss, purely due to his own misconceptions.

But he'd been wrong. Lufas wasn't on such a lukewarm setting. If she felt like it, she could destroy the entire world at any time. She had far too much power for any one person, and she even led an organization named the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars. On the off chance Sei's evaluation of Lufas was wrong, then in the worst case, this world could come to an end. That was scarier than anything else to Sei.

"Sh- Shall we just focus on finding an inn for now? A lot's happened, so I think we should take it easy, at least for today," Kross suggested.

"You're right. Our exhaustion's piled up. We should rest now instead of pushing ourselves," said Sei.

He felt something was out of place though. Their travels so far had been

supported by a squad of rangers cooperating with them from the shadows. They had duties like procuring food, gathering information, and securing rooms at inns. Normally, the ranger squad would appear a little after they arrived at a town and inform them of where they were staying, but that hadn't happened today.

Sei paused, contemplating the situation. "Um, Kross... Could it be that..." He hesitated. "Everyone in the ranger squad was left behind in Draupnir...?"

Now that Sei had pointed it out, Kross finally noticed the lack of the ranger squad, and fell silent. His face paled, and he suddenly looked around, trying to find someone from the ranger squad nearby, but of course, there was nobody. After all, Sei and the others had been riding in Suzuki ever since they had met Lufas, which meant they were moving at over sixty kilometers per hour on average. That wasn't a speed which humans could catch up with on foot.

Actually, catching up might have been possible for the people of this world if they had had enough levels, but at the very least, the members of the ranger squad weren't capable of that. Setting aside instantaneous bursts of speed, it was impossible for them to output that much speed over long periods or distances, such as from Draupnir to here. The rangers were skilled, but they weren't inhuman.

"A-Anyway, let's find an inn for now. Maybe they'll surprise us and catch up if we just wait a little bit," Kross said with a faraway look.

He definitely hadn't said this because he wanted to avoid reality, nor was it because he was experiencing extreme inner turmoil, thinking that he'd messed up big time. Definitely not.

The party passed through the thriving, busy streets before laying eyes on an inn. From the outside, it didn't look too bad. It seemed clean, and it faced a large street. Of course, that would raise the price accordingly, but they were the hero's party, as guaranteed by the king. Naturally, they had money, and given the fact that they'd retrieved an elixir in Draupnir, they were actually almost bursting with coin.

Rather than being weirdly stingy and going for a cheap inn, it was better for them to go the route of buying safety and going with a more expensive option

where they could relax more. An inn's facilities weren't the only thing that determined its cost. Safety had its own price as well, which was why cheaper inns were to be avoided. Naturally, people who could only afford cheap inns stayed in places like that, and those people were easily both able and willing to steal other customers' belongings. In particularly bad ones, the proprietors themselves might even go after their customers' belongings.

Sei and the others paid at the counter and took their keys before heading to their respective rooms.

Anyway, I'm really tired. Let's just rest easy today. With that thought, Sei opened the door to his room. At the same moment, the door to the room next to his opened as well.

"Hmm?"

"Ah."

And none other than Lufas herself walked out.

5

Why did it turn out like this? Sei thought. He heaved a sigh steeped in melancholy as he walked down the large main street.

Sei didn't know what kind of forces of coincidence were at work here, but the inn they'd decided to stay at was not only the same one the Great Conqueror and her associates were at, they'd ended up next door as well. Not only that, but Lufas and her entourage had roped Gantz and Jean into a round of cards, and they were even now enjoying a game of Seven Bridge. It was all a huge joke.

It's another world, so why cards? Why Seven Bridge in particular? Where did she even learn the rules? No, well, there's always been a nonzero possibility that cards existed in this world anyway. But when I checked with Kross, cards didn't exist in this world. At the very least, not while Kross has been alive...

Mizgarz is warped in some way. Everywhere I turn, I see visions of Earth like a

fabricated fantasy. It all feels like the aftermath or remains of a fairy tale. So there's only one answer. It's clear now. Lufas knows about Earth. Not only that, it's not some hazy knowledge like "There's a world by that name" or anything. Given that she even knows about Earth games and pastimes, it wouldn't be going too far to say that she's been there herself. Only, she was born and raised in Mizgarz, and she should have been sealed these past two hundred years. Could it be that she was actually on Earth while she was sealed or something? Sei considered the possibility, his thoughts stalling. *No, that's idiotic. As if that would be possible.*

"Aggghh... The more I think about it, the more confused I get..." Sei scratched his head, ruffling his hair before deciding to just stop thinking.

From there, he saw the building he was looking for and made for it. His purpose for leaving the inn and walking about by himself like this was twofold: for a change of pace and to get used to his new katana.

He'd heard from Kross that this town had something called a training arena. Apparently it was a place that provided an area to train in for a fee, and it was possible to have a mock battle against a golem created by an alchemist. For those who made their livelihoods through battle, this seemed to be a very valuable facility.

I see. It's definitely true that in this world, where fighting happens daily, places like this would be in high demand. In fact, for adventurers who only fell into the job out of necessity and have no experience, places like this would probably actually be necessary, since they're basically amateurs.

On top of everything else, the place had a manual for customers to peruse, though they weren't allowed to take it outside the building. It apparently allowed people to learn and practice all sorts of martial skills by themselves. To Sei, this was a great boon. After all, his chosen weapon was a katana and not a standard sword, which meant that none of his friends knew how to handle the thing and thus couldn't teach him.

Gantz knew how to use many different weapons due to his occupation as a mercenary, but he was most proficient with axes, then large swords, and lastly, blunt weapons. In other words, he was best at using brute force to overpower

things. “Katanas are a little too sensitive and need too much care to use,” he’d said. “They’re not for me.”

The female knight’s specialty lay in large swords, and Jean favored longswords. The tiger also used large swords. Petto used thin swords like rapiers, so he was the closest to Sei in the group, but even then, thin swords were completely different from katanas.

And so, Sei had been left with no one to teach him how to use his weapon, and had been forced to struggle this far without ever learning how to use it properly. That was exactly why he wanted to make use of this rare chance to proactively learn how to use it.

As Sei approached the training facility, he stopped, having caught something. He’d heard some voices that sounded like they were arguing in a nearby alleyway.

Laegjarn was a fairly safe town with decent public order, but even then, Kross had warned Sei not to wander into back alleys. Places that didn’t directly open to the large main streets turned into hangouts for vagrants, and it was unknown how dangerous the people there were. Therefore, if it had just been the sounds of a simple argument, then Sei probably would have pretended not to have heard anything and proceeded into the training area.

Sei didn’t like saying it out loud, but he felt that any punks and similar people got what they deserved when they fought each other, no matter how hurt they got. However, one of the voices Sei heard sounded like that of a little girl’s, and it sounded scared, so... *I can’t just pretend I didn’t hear that.*

* *

“He he he! Now you can’t run anymore!”

“Now, just give up and come wit’ us!”

Third-rate thugs spouted lines so common that they could be heard in pretty much any back alley of the world. They definitely looked the part too. They were men whose appearance screamed “I’m a thug and a punk!” more than anybody Sei had encountered up until now. They had on disgusting, filth-covered clothes and similarly nasty grins. There were knives in their hands, and

all five of them surrounded one girl.

If I were to categorize that species, I suppose it'd be Primate order, Hominidae family, Thug genus.

People like this weren't exactly rare. They could usually be found in any back alley in a large-enough city. Mysteriously enough, they all spoke similarly and had equally poor vocabularies, so Sei couldn't help but actually voice his thoughts out loud. "Maybe they're actually just that type of monster or something?"

Lufas would have said that they were humanoid mob monsters all using the same sprite.

"You don't hafta be so scared. We're super nice. We swear!"

"Yeah! We're total gentlemen!"

"Though that really just means pervert."

The men surrounded the girl, cutting off any avenue of escape as they emphasized their words with the knives in their hands.

In what way are any of you gentlemen? Even orcs are more gentlemanly than you.

The cornered girl looked very tense, but she still firmly gripped her well-used staff. She was facing off against five people, but none of them were that strong on their own. Though having allowed them to get so close had already put her at a disadvantage, the girl judged that her level was higher than theirs at least. In fact, the level difference was large. In comparison to the thugs, whose average level was around 10, the girl's level was over 50. The gap was big enough that the girl should never lose if she didn't happen to be a mage with almost no close combat ability. Well, if she'd at least had a sword, she might still have been able to deal with them.

She was a mage, but she'd learned swordsmanship from her father, who was a mercenary. Of course, she was a far cry from an actual swordsman, but even so, she would have been able to defeat these thugs in a fight if she had a proper weapon. Right now, though, the only weapon she had was a staff for self-defense which was easy to walk around with. If she had been going outside of

town, then she'd have prepared a full set of equipment, but at the moment, she only had the rather unreliable staff in her hands.

Start with one person first... Use Fireball and turn them into a burning mass. Then, if I manage to put some distance between us while they're confused... As long as I have some space, there's no way I'll lose.

The girl had never seen a real battle. She'd simply spent her days in Svel reading books and learning magic. On top of that, she'd recently had all her self-confidence pulverized until there had been nothing left. Even so, she told herself that she wasn't weak enough to lose to people like this.

However, the moment she tried to use magic her staff suddenly disappeared. Shocked, she stared at her now-empty hands.

"Whoa, that was dangerous. You shouldn't be doing something so violent."

Her staff was now in the hands of a man who stood behind the group of thugs.

What the hell did he do? Extreme speed? Manipulation of objects? I don't know! The girl didn't understand what had just happened.

The staff thief was clearly different from the others, who were just thugs. He was a slender man with wavy brown hair and blue eyes wearing fine clothes. His face was beautiful, and at first glance he seemed to be a noble. But the vulgar desires that could be seen in his eyes couldn't be hidden, and the girl felt a sense of discomfort looking at them.

"Please don't make too much trouble for me. You plebeians are forcing me to use my precious time and effort... Do you know just how heavy a crime that is? I'd appreciate it if tools acted like tools should and stayed quiet and obedient."

"The hell are you..."

The girl's expression turned angry upon hearing this incredibly rude, selfish statement, but the slender man didn't seem to care. He was overflowing with confidence, as if he knew he would never lose in a fight, and he wore a smile that said he looked down on everyone else.

That was when another voice interrupted, and the man's expression finally

showed a hint of displeasure.

“Hey, you guys! The hell are you doing?!”

Sei, who’d heard the voices and came running, commanded everyone’s attention. When they realized what they were seeing, however, the five thugs laughed uproariously like they’d just seen an idiot. *Oh, it was just some brat thinkin’ he’s some kinda arbiter of justice or somethin’*, they thought. With their weapons in hand, they unguardedly approached Sei, flashing their knives.

“What’s up, bro? You playin’ at bein’ some kinda lawman?”

One of them whistled. “You’re so cool!”

“Don’t get shit twisted. We’re not villains. We’re gentlemen.”

“Though that’s just another word for pervert.”

Seeing Sei’s unreliable-looking frame, the thugs had completely underestimated him. However, Sei wasn’t cowed. He glared straight at the group of men.

“I don’t know exactly what’s going on here, but don’t you think it’s embarrassing to be grown men and still feel the need to surround a single girl like that?”

“Huh? The fuck? This kid’s gettin’ too big fer his britches.”

“I’m done with this. Let’s just kill ‘im.”

The thugs all reached for Sei, but he calmly dodged and instead grabbed one of the thugs’ arms and threw him.

“You bastard!”

“Asshole. How dare you do that to Pielar!”

They must have never expected such a boy to attack them, but the remaining four thugs still attacked him at once. Now that Sei had gotten through that battle at the demihumans’ village, a fight like this was nothing, and the thugs seemed far too slow.

Without even a change in expression, Sei used knife-hand strikes and elbow strikes to knock the thugs out. In the blink of an eye, all five of them were on

the ground.

The thin man in the back started to clap. “Oh ho. You’re good. You really can’t judge a book by its cover,” he said, before proceeding to step on the face of one of the fallen thugs. “On the other hand... You are all so useless. I suppose trash is just trash at the end of the day. You keep—” He stomped. “Making me—” He stomped again. “Expend effort.” And he kept stomping. He stomped on the thug’s face many times over, without stopping even when their teeth caved in and when they started bleeding. “Such useless...tools!”

“Hey, what do you think you’re doing?! They’re your comrades, aren’t they?!”

“Comrades? Don’t joke. These’re just tools. Even you throw away tools you can’t use, right? This is the same thing.”



The slender man gave one last stomp before wiping the blood stuck to the bottom of his shoe on their clothes. Then, he turned to Sei with a smile on his face.

“Now then, to be quite honest, wasting effort on a plebeian like you is just foolish, but I suppose it can’t be helped since my tools were so useless. I’ll have to put you in a world of hurt myself.”

Wary of the new, unknown hostile, Sei silently put up his guard. *Looks like the thin guy wants a fight.*

Sei took a stance, but, the next moment, he lost sight of the thin man. Then, he felt a shockwave run through his gut, and he staggered.

It hurts?! I was attacked? When?! Sei had taken damage even though he hadn’t been attacked. He was bewildered at such an unbelievable turn of events, but that only lasted an instant. In the end, he’d gone through actual battle, so he’d gained at least some grit. Abandoning rational thought in the middle of a battle was a death sentence, so Sei reset his thoughts, putting aside his confusion and immediately starting to look for the slender man.

Sei couldn’t see him, but at his feet he could feel a shadow that wasn’t his right beside his own.

“Behind me!”

As Sei turned around, he threw out a kick. It must have taken the slender man by surprise, since he managed to jump backwards. He wasn’t able to completely evade the kick though, and Sei’s foot grazed the man’s nose.

The slender man touched down safely, but the expression on his face changed when he saw the drops of red he’d left on the ground. The kick which had grazed him had made his nose bleed. He glared, outraged. “You damn commoner! My face!”

After wiping the blood roughly from his nose, the slender man once again disappeared. Right afterwards, Sei felt a shock as if he’d been punched in the face. Then, the shock was followed up by more to his gut, shoulders, and jaw, pain assailing him.

There's no doubt. I'm being attacked somehow! I'm not being punched, but somehow, I am! I'm not being kicked, but I still feel it! Is it the Esper class's telekinesis? Or is he just that fast? Sei couldn't tell which of those it was or if it was something completely different. Luckily, however, the man's strength and level weren't far removed from Sei's.

The hero braced himself, grimacing through the pain and stopping himself from falling over. He also threw a fist out at the slender man, whose figure he caught out of the corner of his eye, but the man only disappeared again.

"Don't get a big head just because you got lucky and landed one hit. You'll never win against me because I hold the power of an invincible hero!"

The slender man grinned wide as he reached into a breast pocket.

Is he going for a weapon? Sei thought, quickly reaching for the katana at his waist.

"Stop there, Sir Debris."

A man's voice rang out from the darkness, breaking the tense atmosphere. The man who appeared was tall, mustachioed, and in his thirties.

Sei, seeing the newcomer, felt even tenser than before. *This man... He's strong. Probably stronger than Jean. He might even be as strong as Gantz.*

"He's the hero that was officially recognized by the royal family of Laevateinn. You won't gain anything by fighting him here."

"Hero? Oh? This one? That family really is no good. They've got no ability to scout talent."

The second man remained silent before giving a warning. "Be careful what you say. If someone related to the royal family hears that, you might be arrested."

The slender man—Debris—scrunched up his face in displeasure, saying nothing as he punched the man venting his anger. The man, who seemed to have predicted this, swayed for a moment but didn't move an inch, saying nothing.

Debris glared at Sei before declaring, "I know your face now. Remember that

playing the hero of justice has a high cost,” in a low voice.

With that, the two men turned and left. Once they were gone, Sei sighed, releasing the tension from his body. Then, he turned to talk to the girl who had been accosted and realized for the first time that the girl was familiar.

“Huh? You’re...” He trailed off. “Alfie?”

She was the mage girl who had once joined Sei’s party, aiming to defeat both the Devil King and the Great Conqueror, but had left right after having her spirit broken in the two monsters’ fight.

6

The atmosphere was awkward and uncomfortable. Alfie had once been recognized by the king and chosen to join the hero’s party, but she’d grown cold feet and left. This meant that, from Sei’s perspective, she was a coward and a deserter. Of course, Sei didn’t actually think that. He even indicated that he understood that such a reaction was only natural after seeing that fight, but that still didn’t mean he could simply greet her casually after all this time.

Alfie herself also felt some guilt towards Sei. She felt that running after declaring they would fight together was shameful. Even then, she was scared. Just thinking about fighting those monsters left her unable to stop trembling.

I mean, it’s only natural, right? she thought. *They’re walking disasters. It’s like telling someone to fight an incoming avalanche or a tsunami or even a falling meteor. Of course it’s impossible. It’s way out of the realm of what living things can accomplish.*

However, Lufas and the Devil King had accomplished just that. They could blow away avalanches with one blow. They could split tsunamis and even crush meteors. That was just how monstrous they were.

That was why Alfie had run. She hadn’t wanted to die trying to fight a battle she couldn’t win. She had once thought that she would fight with her life on the line, that for the future of the world she could put down her own life as

collateral. However, she had been shown that her resolve to do so was weak and contingent on there being some sliver of hope to win.

She had realized the painful truth that she wasn't strong enough to go after a fight she had no chance of winning. Her reason screamed that she should be running instead of fighting the Great Conqueror or Devil King. Just like natural disasters, there was nothing to be done about them, so she felt that she should at least be lowering the casualties as much as possible. That was the answer she'd come to.

But the boy who had been weak at the time had continued his journey, and now Alfie was shown the speed of his growth. He was still immature, but he was so much stronger compared to the past that they were almost completely different people. *Then what about me?* she thought. *I just ran, and now I was saved...* Alfie felt that she was incorrigibly embarrassing as well as wretched.

Sei had realized that their conversation would stay at a standstill if he didn't do anything, so after another moment of silence, he resolved himself and forced himself to say something. "Uhhh... Umm..."

Alfie flinched in surprise when he spoke, her shoulders trembling as she quietly watched Sei. There was fear in her eyes. She was afraid he would blame her for running. She was scared she'd be yelled at for being a coward.

"I-It's been a while... You look...good. Anyway, uh... Yeah. What a coincidence, huh?" Sei said, choosing a harmless opening that had no chance of hurting her.

"Y-Yes, you're right. I never expected to see you here," Alfie replied awkwardly, relieved.

"F-For now, let's get out of here. This place isn't safe."

"Y-Yeah."

Their conversation wasn't flowing well, but they both knew what needed to be done at the moment. First, they had to get out of this back alley. If they didn't, they couldn't be sure how many random thugs and punks would come out of the woodwork. The thug life-form tended to pop up almost infinitely in places with bad public order.

Sei and Alfie both ran back to the main street before proceeding to look for a

place where they could talk at their leisure. They settled for a nearby eatery. It was a fairly fancy place with a crab sign that read King Crab Eatery #4.

“Welcome to the Laegjarn branch of King Crab.”

They were greeted by an employee wearing a red vest who seated them near a window. *Is it just me or do these people wear the exact same clothes as Karkinos from Lufas’s party?* Sei wondered. The two ordered what they wanted, and now that they could finally relax, they started to talk again.

“Um... So, may I ask you something? Why were you being chased by people like them?”

“Well... Hmm... Yeah, it’d be better to tell you, I think, since knowing would make you less likely to get yourself involved in something stupid than not knowing.”

The men who chased Alfie down obviously aren’t normal. They probably belong to a wealthy person, a noble. One who’s really arrogant to boot.

Such things weren’t exactly rare. Even on Earth, the world had basically been entirely in the hands of the noble class during the Middle Ages, and as history proved, many of them tended to be oppressive and tyrannical. Japan had been no different. You could’ve gotten yourself cut down in the street just by bumping into a samurai. *The problem is why people like that are chasing Alfie.*

“I just ended up seeing something I shouldn’t have. Basically, they’re trying to stop me from talking.”

“Something you shouldn’t have?”

“You know that there’s an annual martial tournament held in this city, right?”

“Yeah. I heard from Kross.”

While they were talking, a waiter brought the tea that Alfie had ordered and placed a cup of freshly squeezed fruit juice in front of Sei before quickly leaving.

“So about that tournament. The prize this year is the honor of becoming the hero of the territory of the spear.”

“Hero?”

“Yes. They probably think that if their hero manages to take down either the Devil King or the Great Conqueror, they’ll then have more influence over the royal family.” Alfie paused. “Even though they’ll never be able to win.”

While listening to Alfie, Sei imagined a hero in armor resolutely battling against Lufas or the Devil King. In his imagination, Lufas had an evil-looking smile, and behind her waited the Twelve Heavenly Stars in their full monstrous forms.

Sei quietly considered the scene. *No, yeah, it’s impossible. Wouldn’t even take a second.* With that thought, Sei took a sip of his juice.

“But that’s where the problem starts. Apparently the lord, the head of the Spess family, wants to make his heir the hero.”

“And that was the guy just then?”

“Yes. Debris Spess. He’s the eldest son of the Spess family.” Alfie sipped her tea, her eyebrows scrunched unhappily. “He’s just the worst. He’s poisoning his opponents so he can win.”

“Poison?!”

“Yeah. Well, it isn’t strong enough to kill them though. He uses a relatively weak poison to make them really sleepy and give them stomachaches so intense they feel like they’re dying. So of course they aren’t able to fight properly.”

As soon as Sei heard the word poison, his mind immediately went to Lufas’s follower Scorpius. He didn’t really have a good impression of her.

“And it gets even worse... If he ever takes a liking to a woman, he just kidnaps them under the guise of treatment once he renders them immobile. One of my friends was participating in the tournament, and he took her.”

“I see. So you saw that, and now you’re being chased.”

“Exactly. I want to save her as soon as possible, but I’m alone... He has some sort of weird power too. I’m at a disadvantage.”

Weird power... Yeah, it’s gotta be that thing. Sei considered the unknown skill the man had used. He could move in an instant, putting out attacks that Sei

couldn't remember being dealt, as well as taking Alfie's staff. As long as the skill was unknown, Sei didn't believe they could win.

Alfie tried to continue but couldn't quite get the words out of her mouth. In truth, she wanted to ask Sei to help her, but she'd already abandoned him and run from the party once, so she couldn't bring herself to do it.

Still though, she wanted to save her friend. She thought she should ask him for help despite it being a shameless thing to do and something she had no right to ask for, but in the end, she couldn't force herself to ask. *He's willing to talk to me like this, so am I hoping somewhere in my heart that he'll help me? He might help if I ask, but wouldn't that be because of my shameless and wretched manipulations? I'm so...shameless.* Self-loathing rose within Alfie, and she bit her lip. Alfie decided to leave before she could allow herself to be coddled and rose out of her seat.

"I feel a bit better after talking. Thank you."

I abandoned him. I was scared and ran. The past will never change. Even then, I want him to save me as soon as I'm in danger? How could I ask something so self-serving? I can't. I shouldn't. So I can't keep him involved. He has his own mission. He doesn't need to get mixed up in dumb fights between regular people like this.

"I'll pay the bill. Please relax here as long as you like."

"The food hasn't come yet though..."

Alfie didn't reply immediately, her eyes wavering. *Oh yeah, I ordered an apple pie out of habit.* "It's my thanks for saving me. You can have it."

"Getting treated by a girl is just uncool, so please spare me. Why are you trying to leave all of a sudden?"

"That's..."

Sei gazed at Alfie straight on and spoke forcefully. "There's no way I can pretend I'm not involved after hearing all this. I'll help."

Alfie may have been hoping to hear those words, but she also feared them. Despicably, she wished for someone to save her, but she was so honest and

straightforward that the truer she was to herself, the more distinctly she felt her own vulgarity and cowardice.

Alfie hadn't spent much time with Sei, so she didn't know his nature as a person. Yet even then she had an inkling, given that he'd answered a summons from another world. He was just too nice.

"Okay, let me get my friends first..."

"W-Wait!"

Sei's move to gather people to help was absolutely correct. They were up against a noble, and it was only natural for nobles to have many people working under them. Trying to fight with just the two of them was reckless.

However, Alfie regarded Sei and his party members as people she'd abandoned once, so gathering them all to help her was like lying on a bed of nails. It would be way past just uncomfortable. However, Sei wasn't so dense as to not have noticed this; he knew what Alfie was worried about.

"Don't worry. I'll just get the people who weren't around for that fight. That should make it a bit easier for you, right?"

Alfie paused, considering the offer. "I-If that's what you're doing, then..."

"Okay, just wait a little bit then. I'll go get them now."

With that, Sei left his seat, casually leaving the payment for their food on the table. *I'm not sure what it's like in this world, but at least in Japan it's embarrassing for a man to let a woman pay.*

Ten minutes later, a group of people stood in front of Alfie, who definitely had not been around for the fight that had broken her will.

"You're such a goody-two-shoes, Sei. But it's true that noble brat makes me angry, so I'll help you."

First, there was the adventurer Jean. He hadn't been with the party on their first aborted attempt, being someone the king had brought in later, so he had no idea who Alfie was. From her perspective, he just seemed "kind of like a punk," though she felt that he basically wasn't a problem.

"Using authority for evil is inexcusable. I will give him a taste of my sword."

Next, there was the cat beastfolk, Petto. Alfie had to desperately control her desire to pet and cuddle him as she saw him try to stretch his tiny body to look as big as possible. *What the hell? He's so cute!* she thought. *I wanna floof him.* Cats are the kind of dangerous animal that can charm people just by existing.

"I do not understand human towns too well, but if you desire my help, then I will respond in the name of righteousness. Do not worry. No weak human soldier can win against me."

The third member was clearly dangerous. His form, which was completely hidden underneath his mantle and hood, was obviously suspicious. Not only that, but every once in a while something like a bug's leg poked out from the gaps in the covering. His words also clearly indicated he wasn't human, which made Alfie worried as to just who Sei had brought with him.

"I understand what's happening. Let's do our best together!"

The fourth member was a heaven-winged girl with pure-white wings. She looked lovely, but the whiteness of her wings was strange. *Aren't pure-white wings a sign of royalty? Is this really all right?* Alfie wondered, wanting to believe that the girl just happened to have been born with the color and was wholly unrelated to her misgivings.

"Bark!"

And then there was the dog currently standing next to Sei, wagging its tail.

No, wait a second. Will the dog even help? However, everyone who had been introduced so far was at least barely acceptable in Alfie's eyes. *Honestly, they do not seem like they belong to a hero's party...* This was her honest impression, but they fit the bill. They checked the box of not having been there for the fight, as she was meeting them for the first time. Alfie wouldn't feel uncomfortable with them at all. There was just one exception.

"Yo, Alfie! Your daddy came to help!"

Alfie couldn't find the words to reply, staying silent.

The last member was Gantz. He was a master mercenary with a shaved head and amazing muscles. Of course, Alfie was aware of his fame and strength. She also knew he'd be reliable. *Of course he'll be reliable. He's my daddy.*

Alfie glared at Sei, trembling with rage. *Why in the world did he bring my dad, of all people?!*

7

The many entrants of the martial tournament were bursting with excitement that day. Their gazes were all concentrated on a circular ring. In that ring, two sword-bearing entrants clashed, sparks flying everywhere. However, the fight itself was one-sided. One of the fighters, a beautiful, brown-haired male warrior wearing heavy armor, was attacking the other contestant.

Eventually, the other contestant fell to his knees. “Damn you...” he muttered begrudgingly. “You cheating coward...”

“Oh? Whatever could you be talking about? I wish you wouldn’t blame me for your own lack of skill.”

“How dare you...! You’re the one who poisoned me, you bastard!”

“Did I really? I don’t know anything about that. A subordinate who loves me too much may have done it on their own, but that doesn’t have anything to do with me, does it?”

The contestants’ conversation was lost in the tumult of the audience, unable to be heard by anyone else. To the audience, it only looked like the loser was howling something.

“Well, even if what you said was true, a child could still tell who would be more fitting as a hero between you—an inelegant oaf—and a noble like me. Look at the audience. None of them want you to win either. They only came to watch my glorious victory and see you crawling on the ground, defeated.”

“Yooouuuuuu!”

The fallen warrior clenched his fist and punched, but it didn’t connect. He’d found himself unable to muster his full strength, only striking with about half his might, ever since he’d drunk what had been served in the waiting room.

Debris laughed scornfully at the warrior as he swung his sword. The swipe

removed everything from the warrior's elbow down, causing him to scream in intense pain. However, there were no cries of outrage. This was a serious match with real weapons, after all, so while winning without killing the opponent was preferable, killing them was by no means illegal. Deaths were only considered an accidental outcome of the sport.

“Gaaarrgghh...! I... I give—!”

Even though the warrior attempted to forfeit, Debris didn't allow him to finish his sentence. Instead, he skewered the warrior's throat. Of course, attacking an opponent that had forfeited was against the rules. However, that was only the case if the judge heard the contestant forfeit.

This time, the judge heard no such thing, remaining silent even after the warriors' exchange. Sure, the words had probably reached his ears. The sound had probably passed through his eardrums and into his brain. The judge had decided he'd heard no such thing though, and acted as if the warrior had refused to submit out of stubbornness and died. Catching Debris breaching the rules would simply incur the wrath of the Spess family, meaning nothing but loss and hardship for the judge.

“That's it! This match goes to Contestant Debris!”

With the judge's call, Debris raised both his hands into the air in victory to appeal to the audience, which sent them into an excited frenzy.

It had all happened as planned. Before the match, Debris would arrange it so his opponent was poisoned or drugged, then he'd buy out the judge so his victory was almost guaranteed. If he didn't like his opponent, he could just ignore their declaration of forfeit and kill them, and any women who had the potential to become a toy could be taken away by him in the name of medical treatment. The audience surely thought he was just being a gentleman.

Oh, yeah, Debris thought, suddenly reminded of something. That reminds me. That toy I got before was pretty fun. If I remember right, she was a knight. Her face was pretty good, so it was worth punching. Oh, right. Now that I think about it, she called out the name of some guy while I was playing with her. I wonder how he'll react if I show him what she's like now?

To Debris, commoners were only good for being looked down upon, but they

did have a single redeeming feature. It was fun to make them into toys. However, toys always broke eventually after too much use.

It's probably about time to throw that woman away. She stopped reacting recently. This was exactly why I appointed that woman's friend, the mage girl Alfie, to be my new toy. But even though she was bestowed with such an honor, she ran away. How rude can someone get?

On top of that, I was interrupted by that guy Sei. His head's gotten too big just because he was appointed by the king. I really don't like him. Mere commoners shouldn't oppose me or stand up against me. They're all just my toys. They have no other reason to exist! Yeah, that's exactly why I've decided to break them. I'll break everything that hero holds dear. I guess that'd be his friends?

Right about now, Debris's lackeys were heading to the inn the people who'd come into town with Sei were staying at in order to attack them.

There were several beautiful women with him too, Debris thought. Maybe I should make some of them my new toys.

He hadn't noticed. Not yet. He had no idea that the beautiful woman he was referring to was a walking disaster, someone who should definitely never be messed with.

* *

There were many inns in Laegjarn. Many people such as mercenaries, adventurers, and swordsmen looking to test themselves flowed through the city, so the demand for inns naturally swelled. Among all these inns, the one those familiar with the city would consider the best was the Ratne Inn.

Apparently the inn had been opened by a young man, the likes of which could be found anywhere, who just wanted a point of contact with his one-sided crush. His crush was associated with the knights, and normally the worlds they lived in were completely different. The young man had yearned for her though, and eventually the inn he'd opened in a last-ditch effort to meet her had gained fame due to the innkeeper's cooking skills.

At first, the girl had simply thought, *I can just try it once*, but eventually, she had gotten hooked on it and stayed there regularly. Because of that, the

innkeeper had continually improved his cooking skills with the single-minded determination to please her. Eventually, the two of them had seen each other over and over, and the innkeeper had become the reason the girl had kept returning. Before she'd noticed, they had both fallen in love with each other, and they proceeded to start dating.

Or so went the love story Dina would not stop talking about over lunch, despite the innkeeper from the story being right there.

Hey, stop that, idiot. Staying quiet about it even though everyone knows the rumors is called kindness.

I gave Dina a reproachful look as I bit into my bread, but she didn't care. She just continued talking while fitting in asides like, "They're so passionate!"

I wonder why women are always so interested in other people's love stories. Honestly, I don't understand it. Hearing about other people being happy and in love just makes me angry. Like, just go and explode.

However, the subject of these rumors, the owner, was looking really gloomy and didn't display any reaction to Dina's story. *Something bad probably happened. Or maybe he got dumped?* I thought as I brought some soup up to my mouth...

An unexpected flavor made me pause, interrupting my train of thought. *It's sweet! What the hell?! This soup is sweet?!*

"Hey, innkeeper! Did you mistake the sugar for salt in this soup?"

"Huh?! I-I'm so sorry! I'll fix it right away!"

Mixing up salt and sugar is such an overdone trope even light novels had stopped doing it recently, and it's worrying that he didn't taste test the soup. I'd heard that the big selling point of this inn was its food, but to be honest, I was slightly disappointed. Every dish I tried was missing something, being just short of what I'd expected. *It's kind of like his heart's not in it maybe...*

It wasn't terrible, but the taste made me feel like the cook was holding back somehow or otherwise not really paying attention to the flavor. It was often said that cooking was about heart, and that really was correct. This saying wasn't literal; people didn't turn their heart or feelings of love into spices to

physically season food with, but cooking was based upon accurate measurements and effort-intensive steps. This meant that to make good food the chef needed to wring out all the nerves and time they had, especially since this wasn't Japan. There was nothing convenient here that you could just throw in a pot, cook for three minutes, and have it turn out delicious. In other words, cooking without someone's heart and attention put into it meant that he had cut corners, which impacted flavor.

How should I put it? Right now, the innkeeper seems to just not be paying attention, like he's thinking about something else as he cooks. I hesitated, considering the situation. Well, I'm not that knowledgeable about cooking in the first place, so maybe this is all in my head. Though at least in cooking manga they churn out dishes that people take one bite of and go, "This dish is packed with love for xx! flash!" And I'm not equipped with such a conveniently skilled palate.

While I pondered this, the owner hesitantly came up to me to talk.

"Um... May I please ask you something? Could you possibly be adventurers?"

"Adventurers? Hmm, right. We are adventurers, at least in name."

If someone asked me whether I was an adventurer, I'd say yes. I'd registered for it when I'd first come to this world, and I was able to take on requests as an adventurer as a result of that. Of course, all I'd done was take a few quests at the very beginning to raise funds for travel. I hadn't done anything as an adventurer at all since then, so I was gradually slipping into NEETHood.

At any rate, he'd asked whether I was technically an adventurer, so... "Do you have some sort of worry, innkeeper?"

He paused, then replied in the affirmative. "Yes."

Something weighed on him heavily enough to want to rely on adventurers, and from the way he was acting, it was quite serious. If he just wanted someone to fix an inability to get precious ingredients or hunt down some monster meat, then he wouldn't seem so grim.

"Could I...trouble you to take my request? The reward will be... I can pay up to five hundred thousand el."

“That’s too much. It would depend on the details, but even ten percent of that would be too much when hiring adventurers.”

“No, I need to pay at least this much. As for why, well, you might be starting a fight with nobles in the worst case.”

The words that came out of the owner’s mouth stopped my spoon in its tracks. *I see. Nobles, huh? Well then, this is seeming more and more troublesome by the second. Still, it wouldn’t hurt to at least listen to what he has to say.* I paused, sensing something. *After I take care of these rude interlopers, that is.*

“Libra,” I said.

“Yes,” Libra, who was standing behind me, replied, as if I’d given her an order.

The inn was currently surrounded, although the innkeeper didn’t seem to understand this. Saying it was killing intent would sound really edgy, but that was what I felt pointed towards us. In game terms, it was like I was being targeted, and I could somehow understand that.

I can feel...twelve people surrounding us. That’s no problem for Libra on her own.

That being said, they’d all be massacred if I left everything to her, so I needed to order her to hold back. I had to at least question the people surrounding us as to why they were attacking, after all.

“Capture all of them and get information from them.”

“Understood. How should I do that?”

“Hmm? Ah... Just do it like normal.”

“I understand my mission. Executing orders.”

The moment I finished giving her orders, Libra walked outside calmly, as if she didn’t suspect a thing. Once she exited, I started hearing men screaming over and over. *I have no idea who any of you are, but I still feel for you anyway.*

Eventually, the screams died down. The entrance once again opened, revealing Libra without even a speck of blood on her. She was dragging twelve men behind her as well, all of whom had been tied up. They’d been rendered

completely helpless—their arms and legs were bent the wrong way without exception, cloth was stuffed into their mouths, and they’d been blindfolded.

“I have captured them. I will now proceed to interrogation. Should I borrow Aigokeros’s power for this?”

“Yes.”

“Wait just a second there, Libra,” said Scorpius. “Wouldn’t my poison be better for interrogations?”

“No, I am able to get information out of them even without your help.”

“Grrrrrrr...”

Just like that, Libra took Aigokeros upstairs with her. While they ascended, the men she dragged behind her hit the stairs repeatedly. *Is that really okay? Whatever you do, don’t dirty my room. We don’t actually own the place.*

“Sagittarius.”

“Yes!”

“Once Libra has everything she can get from them, find the one who ordered them to do this.”

“Understood.”

I handed out my orders while tearing my bread into pieces and dipping them in my soup. Screams immediately came from the room we were renting; it sounded like the world was ending.

What the hell is happening in there? I shuddered to imagine. *But, well... I have no idea who they are, but I can’t really be too merciful given that they’ve decided to make enemies of us. I’ll respond in kind if they come at us. Allowing it to breed future trouble would mean even more trouble, so I’ll be cleaning all this up, if possible.*

All I could say about them was that they picked the wrong time to pull this. If they had faced off against me when I had first come to this world, then I might not have been so cold. I might even have given them mercy. A half-assed middle ground probably did exist, but apparently I wasn’t nearly that kind anymore.

Sei was hiding in and investigating a waiting room behind the scenes of the tournament, which was still going on showily. The waiting room had been prepared by the Spess family, who ran the tournament. If Alfie's words were to be believed, then Debris had kidnapped several contestants. However, that didn't mean they could just come crashing in fists first. If they did, then the other side would just come up with some excuse, and Sei and the others would be the ones branded as criminals. Moreover, their opponents were the nobles who governed the entire spear territory. They couldn't be careless in their approach.

Sei and the others had the status of heroes chosen by the king. Careless moves might affect the king and cause people to lose trust in him. If that happened, then Debris, who was filled with ambition, might be able to use the incident as leverage. Things would have been easier if a monster like Lufas, who had no social fetters and could destroy not only a noble family but humanity as a whole by her lonesome, had been doing this, as she could just waltz in through the front. However, that wasn't an available option, so instead, they needed to gather proof first in order to gain just cause.

They were already past the stage of simply suspecting that the Spess family was engaging in criminal activity, since Sei had seen Alfie being cornered. Debris had hired thugs, and he had even been seen abusing them when they had turned out to be useless. Setting aside feelings, Debris had yet to ever exceed simply being somewhat suspicious from an outsider's point of view, so the first order of business was securing proof. But...

"Did you find anything?" Gantz asked.

Sei shook his head. "No, nothing on my end."

After searching the waiting rooms of the contestants thought to have been taken, they found nothing that even resembled evidence. It seemed everything had been thoroughly cleaned. They could have captured Debris if they'd at least found evidence that the drinks had been poisoned, which may have then been used to snowball into other things, but nothing was ever that easy.

“Oh, yeah... Alfie, how did you figure out the contestants were being poisoned?” Sei asked. “I’m not doubting you, but maybe the poison is more obvious to people who know about it or something...”

Alfie was quiet for a moment, but eventually said, “I know because I actually drank some.”

“What?”

“I’m telling you, I drank some,” Alfie answered, averting her gaze. “So Raile was waiting in her room before the match— Oh, Raile is my friend’s name. Anyway, I was called to her waiting room, and I drank some tea she offered me. Like I said, the poison itself only makes you sleepy and unable to muster your strength, so I was able to move again after a while. But Raile had already lost her match. I panicked and hurried to try to find her, and that’s when I found Debris in the process of taking her somewhere, and I got chased to force my silence.”

“I-I see.”

Apparently Alfie’s pretty careless. No, well, I guess you’d never expect a drink your friend gave you to be poisoned in the first place. Not to mention her friend was also poisoned, so predicting this would probably be pretty difficult...

“Hey, Petto,” Jean said. “Can you find anything using your sense of smell?”

“Don’t ask for the impossible. Dog beastfolk are the ones who are good at that. I am a cat. So, no.”

“Aw, the hell? You’re so useless.”

Jean and Petto also seemed to have struck out in the room they had been searching, so they regrouped with Sei. If Petto had happened to be a dog beastfolk then he would have been able to follow the trail of the faintest scent, but as a cat, that was impossible.

They had nothing. Everyone was dejected after realizing that, but while they were trying to come up with their next steps, a single being was moving. The dog that had been at Sei’s feet the entire time suddenly ran off down the hallway as if he’d suddenly realized something.

“Hey, where’re you going?!”

Sei hurried to follow, and soon enough, he rounded a corner and found the dog howling at a wall in a slightly higher-pitched voice than normal. *Why is this dog so concerned about a wall?* Sei tried touching the wall, but nothing seemed off. It was just a wall.

Gantz and the others caught up at that point, and Jean immediately understood what was going on. “Move aside, Sei. I’m pretty sure I know what this is,” Jean said as he knocked on the wall, looking for a difference in the sound it made.

As an adventurer, he’d gone into ruins many times, so the difference in sounds was something only he could know as someone with experience. Ruins often had hidden doors like this, and being able to find and open them was a necessary skill for first-rate adventurers. After searching for a while, Jean finally found a small hole at the bottom of the wall, a hole so small no one would ever notice it unless they knew it was there.

“Jackpot!”

Jean took what seemed to be a wire out of his pocket and shoved it into the hole. Then, he fiddled with it for a bit. Something clicked, and Jean returned the thing to his pocket. With that done, he touched the wall, moving it to the side. In doing so, the wall slowly slid away and revealed a hidden passage.

“That’s pretty impressive.”

“I *do* happen to be a famous adventurer. Something like this is easy to figure out.”

The group entered the passage with Jean in front and Gantz as the rear guard. The victims, as well as several of Debris’s lackeys, were most likely at the end of this passage, wherever it led.

They descended some stairs and approached a corner when Jean stopped. He signaled for Sei and the others to be quiet before carefully peeking around the corner. As expected, there were several guards posted ahead, and they had weapons. Charging in full force was an option, of course, but if they ended up having issues putting the lackeys down and reinforcements came, then they’d

be in trouble.

Sei and his group were by no means weak. They had Gantz, who was hailed as the strongest mercenary, and Sargess, an ex-demihuman leader. Given members like them, the group was actually pretty strong. But even then, if they were faced with one or two hundred people they'd be brought down by sheer numbers. Moreover, they were in enemy territory. There was no telling what kind of traps the enemy had in place.

"Leave it to me," Sargess piped up in a confident tone before swiftly jumping out of the shadows and running along the wall.

He was so quick about it the soldiers had no chance to react. Just like that, Sargess moved to the ceiling, and no sooner had he dropped on top of them than several soldiers similarly fell to the floor.

"Wh-What the...?!"

"An attack?!"

The soldiers panicked and hurried to ready themselves, but Sargess had already disappeared from view. The next moment, Sargess launched himself at them from the side, taking one of the soldiers with him and slamming the poor man against a wall before continuing on. He moved exactly like a hunter. His victims couldn't even make sense of what was happening; they were simply picked off one after the other. It only took a few scant seconds before all the soldiers were unconscious, and once Sargess had finished his hunt, he returned to Sei and the others.

"Okay, let's go," he said.

Having seen Sargess's strength, Sei and Jean raised their voices in shock and admiration.

"Y-Yeah," Sei said, shocked.

"Dang, spider dude," Jean said after a moment of awed silence.

Sargess was frightening as an enemy but also truly reliable as a friend. In fact, they were now starting to wonder how they had managed to win, though it was a bit late for that. *Well, we didn't exactly win through sheer skill and strength...*

After some progress, Sei smelled something off-putting, and he scrunched his face in disgust. “Hmm? This smell... Is there blood ahead?”

Petto also seemed wary of the smell, saying, “I have a bad feeling about this. Let’s be careful,” after a moment of silence.

The party started to move slower and more carefully. Eventually, they came upon a scene that made them want to vomit.

It was women.

There were broken women everywhere. They’d been disposed of. One woman, who was hanging from the ceiling by her bindings, was strong enough to groan. There was another one who’d been pinned to the wall and had darts sticking out of her. A woman who was slumped on the floor let out a wordless groan as well, and there was another one in the back of the room with a face so burned it was impossible to tell what she had looked like before. Virgo had to cover her mouth after seeing this sight, and everyone else had similar disgusted reactions.

“This is awful...”

“What the hell...is this?”

“Tch... So this is what nobles do for fun? How dare they call themselves ‘noble’!”

Sei resisted the urge to vomit, but Jean didn’t bother to hide his disgust and spat. Gantz said nothing, but his expression clearly displayed his rage, and Petto’s fist was also shaking.

“Raile! Where’s Raile?!”

Alfie lost her cool after seeing the room, and she started shouting as she looked for her friend. But Raile was nowhere to be seen; no matter how much Alfie looked she couldn’t find her friend. Well, not exactly. Alfie just hadn’t noticed her.

For a long moment, Alfie’s shouting was only met by silence. Then, the woman slumped over in the back spoke up. “That voice... Alfie?” Her face was so burned there was no trace of its former features.

Alfie rushed over and picked her up. “Raile?!”

Oh, what a horrible thing to do to a person! Her features, which had once surely been beautiful, were now stained a dark red. Even her hair had almost all been burned away. Tears built up in Alfie’s eyes, and she hugged her changed friend tightly. “Why...?”

A voice came from behind Sei, answering Alfie’s question. “Ah, please don’t misunderstand. I wasn’t the one who did that. That idiot woman did that to herself.”

Everyone in the room turned around and saw a nobleman along with his followers. Debris Spess was grinning smugly.

“That idiot went and burned her own face, even though I deigned to play with her, since she was somewhat pretty. Thanks to that, it’s just no fun with her anymore. I wonder if she wanted to make some sort of show of fidelity, even though she’s just some knight girl. I just don’t understand it. Well, she’s not even worth fucking anymore, so I can just throw her away, but then I’d only feel annoyed and dissatisfied. And I’m not a fan of simply accepting things. *I* get even.”

It was hard to imagine Debris spouting anything more selfish than that, and Jean was already seething in anger. “You bastard...!” he shouted, going straight for Debris.

As a man, I can’t forgive him! Jean thought. He felt the need to punch Debris until his smug face was just as deformed as Raile’s. No, even more so. But the next instant, Jean felt a sharp pain in his gut and fell to his knees.

“Gagh! Agh...?!”

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t approach me with such familiarity, you lowly, filthy adventurer. I am much, much more valuable than you are. Learn your place.”

Jean was confused. *What happened to me? What did he do?*

Jean had actually been attacked, and it wasn’t only him who was confused. No one else understood what had just happened either. Even Sargess, who had the highest stats among the entire party, was the same, and he couldn’t hide his

surprise.

“I can hardly believe this. You can’t possibly think you can fight me? Please, don’t get so full of yourselves. I’m different from all of you. I am a chosen existence. You plebeians aren’t even allowed to touch me,” Debris said. He held up a finger with a ring on it in front of his face, as if he was showing it off.

“Don’t kid yourself! We’ll never forgive you!”

Alfie thrust her palm outwards, unleashing a bullet of fire, but the flames never reached their intended target. Instead, they hit one of Debris’s followers, who were waiting behind him.

Debris was already behind Alfie with a clenched fist. “What a naughty girl. To think you’d fire magic at me... What would you do if it had hit?” Debris spoke as he punched.

Sargess managed to intervene, stopping the blow and immediately transitioning into a counterattack. However, Debris had disappeared once again.

“...!”

No, he didn’t disappear, Sargess realized. The robes disguising him had been cut, and he felt pain as if he’d been slashed by a bladed weapon. Sargess’s body was tough enough that the wound wasn’t very large, but that wasn’t the problem. Debris had slashed Sargess at a speed so fast that the demihuman couldn’t even register it. That was the problem.

“What the hell is with that toughness of yours? Why won’t my blade work against you?”

Sargess was quiet, analyzing what had just happened. “You use a mighty strange skill there. It’s not speed. It’s more like you’re accomplishing all your moves in an instant before anyone can even register it.”

“Oh ho, so you can tell.” Debris laughed, seemingly impressed after hearing Sargess’s deduction. Then, he showed off his ring once again. “You are correct. You won’t be able to do anything about it even if I explain it to you, so I’ll tell you. You see, I can stop time.”

“Stop...time?! Don’t make up lies! Only the Goddess can do that!”

“I see. Then maybe the Goddess saw fit to give me that power.”

Debris’s smirk deepened, giving off an even stronger impression of him looking down on them as he bragged. He might have always wanted to brag to someone about this, actually. Prideful men who placed importance on how they looked always wanted to show off whatever was special about them.

“This is a divine relic that the Goddess once gifted to the Sword King Alioth in ages past in order to defeat the Black-Winged Conqueror. It’s named ‘The Ring of Time.’ So, what if Alioth entrusted the ring to a friend, and it’s been passed on to that friend’s descendants ever since?”

“N-No way... That’s...”

“Mm, that’s a good expression. It’s the expression of someone who’s realized our absolute difference in power, knows that there’s nothing they can do to win, and is experiencing anger at the unfairness of the world and despair in equal measure. My favorite... Yes, I love it!” Debris smiled wide as he drew the sword at his waist.

In response, Sei and the others all took battle stances, but no one knew how much that would accomplish. After all, their opponent could stop time and attack while they couldn’t move. No amount of defense or evasion could help that.

Debris disappeared, and blood spurted from Sei’s leg. Sei tried to counterattack, but there was nothing he could do in the face of the unfairness of time manipulation.

Thus started a completely one-sided fight.

9

The fight had been going on for some time. Sei and his group had fallen to the floor by this point. Their weapons had been taken and their legs cut. They were no longer in any condition to fight.

Well, they might still have had a chance if it was just Debris they were fighting. It was true that his ability to stop time could not have been more troublesome, and no mercenary or adventurer, no matter how seasoned, could bring out their full power without their weapons. However, the man who acted as Debris's right hand was just as troublesome. If it weren't for him, they would have been able to take advantage of the openings Debris had shown, and victory might have been possible for Sei's team.

Sargess and Virgo were still standing, but neither of them could find a hand to play in the face of the power to stop time.

"Do you all get it now? This is the difference between those who have been chosen and those who have not. The difference between us is insurmountable," said Debris, basking in the glow of his win.

"What the hell are you sounding all proud for...?" Alfie felt she had to get some revenge, so she threw out a snide remark. "Your ring's doing all the work, not you."

At the moment, the only thing she could move freely was her mouth, but apparently those words worked better than Alfie had expected, as Debris's face shifted in anger before their eyes.

It only took a moment for him to formulate a response. "Did you just...insult me?" Debris instantly moved right in front of Alfie and stomped on her back.

"Aggh!"

"You damn lowly plebeian. How dare you—" He stomped. "Insult—" He stomped again. "Me?!" He stomped her back, her head, her arms, and her legs. He seemed to feel no guilt as he trampled her all over without hesitation.

"YOOUUUUU!"

Seeing this, Gantz exploded in anger. He forced himself upright, picked up his ax, and swung with all his might. That caught Debris by surprise, but he quickly disappeared, evading the ax. However, Virgo immediately managed to figure out where Debris would end up with her sharp senses, so she flew, making a swipe with her sword as she did so.

"Eep?!"

Her sword flashed and gleamed, passing by in front of Debris's face. Panicked, Debris stopped time and took some distance, but that only caused Virgo to lose sight of him for a moment. She immediately found him again and changed direction.

She wasn't actually following him through stopped time; she really had lost sight of him. However, their speeds in real time were so different that she simply managed to shift and attack before Debris could even start moving. After fighting for a while she understood. The ring was certainly a threat, but Debris himself wasn't.

Then I'll just push through all at once!

However, Debris's right-hand man stopped Virgo in her tracks.

"That's that. Don't you care what happens to this boy?"

Virgo stopped in tracks, alarmed.

The man was sitting right next to Sei, holding a knife to the hero's throat threateningly. If someone else moved, Sei's throat would be slit. This prohibited Sargess and Virgo from fighting even though they could still move. Just like that, Debris had gained free rein and total safety.

A smile crept up his face, and he started punching Virgo's face in turn.

"Grk!"

"H-How dare you surprise me... You're just a commoner with no redeeming features. You too! Don't just allow me to be exposed to danger! Useless!"

In a fit of irritation, Debris struck his right-hand man before refocusing his attention on Virgo. She'd been punched, but this was where stats made a difference. Her cheek had turned a little red, but it wasn't swollen, and Virgo glared at Debris courageously. That seemed to have touched a nerve, as Debris clicked his tongue, but his expression quickly changed into a rather nasty smile.

"This is troubling. Boorish, impolite commoners like you need to be educated. Don't you know manners are very important? Those who don't will run into a lot of trouble in the future, so I'll teach you for your own sake."

At first, Virgo was quiet, but then replied with, "You don't deserve any

politeness.”

Debris responded to Virgo not with words but with a silent punch.

Gantz clenched his fist in anger so hard he drew blood. Sei was also angry at his own powerlessness after being taken hostage.

Why?! Why am I this weak?! Why am I this wretched and miserable?! I need power... Enough to beat this asshole and protect everyone.

Debris continued to stomp on Alfie while raising his hand to Virgo, but the girls still refused to change their attitudes, and soon his patience reached the end of its rope. “You both need to learn your place,” Debris said, putting his hands on the clothes that Virgo wore and tearing it off all at once. Her white skin as well as the underwear she wore underneath it all were exposed. However, despite her feelings of embarrassment, Virgo still glared at Debris head-on.

“Hey, what do you think you’re doing?!”

“What?” Debris paused. “Isn’t it obvious? I’m educating them. This will be an honor. These mere commoners will have the experience of being bedded by one of noble birth.”

The corners of Debris’s mouth warped into a grin as he tilted Virgo’s chin up. Nobody could stop him. Sei was being held hostage, so no one could move. Debris didn’t even bother to hide his lust as he reached out for Virgo’s underwear with a vulgar look on his face.

The next moment, the ceiling caved in and a beautiful woman in a red cloak descended.

For a moment, there was nothing but stunned silence. “Wha?”

“Hmm. A basement, here of all places? Are you sure this is it?”

“Yes, master. This is the place Sagittarius found.”

There stood the symbol of fear who boasted otherworldly beauty, and a steel doll servant. Lufas took a quick look around, her eyes widening when she spotted Sei and the others. On the other hand, Alfie, faced with the subject of her trauma, went paler than she ever had before. Unlike when Alfie had first

seen Lufas, the Great Conqueror was currently in disguise. She wore glasses and had hidden her wings, but her face was out in the open, so anyone who knew her would see through the disguise right away.

“What are you all doing in a place like this?”

“Th-That’s my question, Lufas,” said Sei. “Why are you here?”

“Ah, there was a request from the owner of the inn. We don’t really care about the reward, but he seemed very concerned and it was affecting his cooking. That seemed like a waste, so We came to solve the problem.”

Sei was shocked at the answer he got, and he started to wonder what the hell all his effort and pain was for. Even though they’d done their best to follow the trail of villainous deeds, Lufas had just done the same thing so easily, and only because she’d wanted to eat good food.

At some point, Libra had separated from Lufas, and now she was back holding the girl with the burned face. “Master, this is who we are looking for. Her features match the description.”

Lufas contemplated in silence for a moment. “Hmm.”

Seeing the woman’s burned face, Lufas narrowed her eyes coldly. Then, she took notice of the wounds Sei’s group had incurred, looking even more unhappy, especially when she took note of Alfie’s state. But all of that was just a drop in the bucket compared to what was next. When she saw Virgo with her underwear exposed, the aura around Lufas changed, and at that moment, all expression disappeared from her face.



Sei, or rather everyone who was present and knew Lufas, instantly felt that they would be killed. The change in her was so striking that even Libra, who should have felt no emotions, almost took on a wary stance against her master.

Lufas stared icily at Debris, pausing for a moment before saying, "We suppose we should ask, just in case. We are without a doubt correct in assuming that one there did all this?"

Debris's expression changed after hearing Lufas's line that seemed to be making fun of him. However, his smug smile quickly reasserted itself, and he spoke pompously. "Huh?! Who the hell are you? You've got quite the big attitude for someone who just dropped in out of nowhere. Ignorance is scary, isn't it? You don't seem to know who I am."

"Indeed. No idea."

On the other hand, Sei had been utterly paralyzed with fear and was unable to even speak anymore, but in his heart, he was screaming. *Stop that! Just stop provoking her! Apologize right now and beg for forgiveness! If you don't...you'll be killed!*

Debris never doubted his own superiority though. He never even noticed he was standing on a land mine. No, a nuclear bomb. No, a star that was moments from supernova.

"Well, whatever. Rejoice, for I appoint you as my toy. Your attitude aside, your looks are superior. You are worthy of being played with by me."

It took a moment for Libra to respond. "Master, let us kill it."

"Wait a moment, Libra. We still have not received an answer. It would not do to have a case of mistaken identity here. We must get to the bottom of things." Lufas persisted in doing nothing, even hiding her anger as she asked her question once again. "So, are you the one who did all this?"

"Yeah, I am. I had to educate them a little, since they defied me. That woman though... She burned her own face for some reason. Apparently she didn't want to be bedded by me. I suppose that bitch just wanted to act like she was fully grown."

“One more question. Virgo, that heaven-winged girl over there, she’s been punched, and her clothes are ripped. Was that also you?”

“Yeah. What about it? She scared me, though it was only a little bit. It’s her just deserts.”

“Hmm... This is amazing. You are like the definition of scum. We could find you in a dictionary. Not to mention, you’re third-rate scum at that,” Lufas said, giving her honest impression of him.

This Debris guy, he’s like a shining example for scumbag nobles everywhere. The fact that he’s this far gone is actually kind of impressive in a way.

By Lufas’s standards, this was actually a kind of compliment, but Debris clearly seemed angered by her words, and he drew his sword. “Looks like you need some education too.” He stopped time.

By feeding mana into the ring, Debris could stop time, rendering everyone but Debris himself into unmoving, unspeaking sculptures. This ring, which was said to have been given to the hero Alioth in order to defeat the Black-Winged Conqueror, was matchless. As long as time was stopped, no one could defeat him, no matter how masterful they were at their craft.

Debris considered his plan of action. *Hmm, maybe I’ll start off by peeling off the clothes of this girl who just showed up. I’m looking forward to seeing that confident face break down in shame.*

With such vulgar plans running through his mind, Debris reached out to Lufas, but his hand was caught, and the flow of time returned to normal.

“Oh ho. Color us surprised. To think you would achieve this speed at your level. Or is there some sort of trick to it?”

“Wha— Huh...?!”

“Ah, We understand. It’s this ring. It seems to be some sort of powerful item.”

Lufas, who’d breached the world of stopped time like it was nothing, spoke as if she hadn’t realized time had even been stopped. In fact, she hadn’t realized such a thing. To her, stopped time was simply what happened when she got serious. It was just a trifling phenomenon that happened because the world

wasn't able to keep up with her, so it just stopped. That was why Debris's time-stop was nothing more than high-speed movement to Lufas. It was something that was only natural to any monsters who inhabited that world. To her, stopping time wasn't even a skill or ability; it was just movement.

Lufas stripped Debris of the ring and observed it closely. "Hmm... 'Divine Relic Chronos,' huh? Impressive. So when it activates, it lowers the speed of the entire world by 10,000 for several seconds. In effect, it stops time." Lufas paused, examining the ring closer. "But this is...defective, isn't it?"

"G-Give it back!"

"Now, now. Wait a second. First, we must take care of what we came here for."

Lufas smiled calmly as she clenched her fist. Then, she punched Debris straight in the face as hard as she could with her steel-like arm, only she'd attached the Blunted-Sword Strike skill to the attack. Debris's nose was crushed, and he was about to be blown backwards, blood flying everywhere, but Lufas grabbed him by the neck and stopped that from happening.

"Whoops. Don't you dare faint on us now, brat. Your punishment is only starting."

Lufas smiled like a ferocious beast facing its prey, and she activated her Pressure. In an instant, everyone in the vicinity was assaulted with a heavy feeling, like the heavens had just fallen on top of them. She wasn't even stopping the world's time. She had simply suppressed everyone with her sheer presence. It was the talent of a king. The world itself shook in fear at the existence named Lufas, and the feeling of intimidation came with actual, physical pressure, which had even cracked the floor. But for all that, it basically didn't affect Sei and those with him at all. She had displayed some strange skill with her abilities; it was as if the aftershocks of her power were sewn to the floor.

"Eep...?!"

This was when Debris finally realized he was the ignorant one. He had finally figured out that he'd picked a fight with an unbelievable monster. But Debris only thought, *Ahh, it's happening again. I'm being looked down on again. I'm*

being laughed at again.

“N-No... I don’t want to be looked down on anymore...! I... I...don’t want to go back to those times again!”

Debris Spess had been abandoned in front of a church as a filthy orphan. During his childhood, he didn’t even know the faces of his parents. His body was weak, and he wasn’t gifted with talent in magic, so every day he was subjected to ridicule. Debris the incompetent. Debris the half-wit. Those were his nicknames. He was never once complimented, and he was always looked at like he was trash.

However, his life made a sudden turn one day. It turned out that he was actually the child of nobility. He’d been kidnapped as a child, and the culprit had been cornered and forced to abandon him in front of a church. After hearing that, he was so overjoyed he couldn’t stop himself from bouncing up and down. *That’s right. I’m really from a noble family,* he thought. *I’m different from those commoners.*

However, his happiness was brief, for what awaited him in his life as a noble were looks of contempt for the time he’d spent as an orphan. So, he pretended he was strong in order to not be looked down upon.

“I won’t go back to being an orphan... I don’t want to be looked down on anymore! That’s why... That’s why I swore to be the one doing the taking, not the one being taken from... That way... That way I won’t be looked down upon...”

That’s why I hurt others more than necessary.

“Who cares?”

Lufas’s fist smashed into Debris’s face once more.

“Gah! Boghh?!”

“Why are you suddenly trying to spill your life story when We didn’t even ask? This cannot possibly be true, but did you think that what you did would be erased just by having a tragic past? We could not care less about your past.”

To Lufas, Debris’s past mattered less than dog shit left by the side of the

street.

He was an orphan? He was looked down on? Who cares? This bastard laid his hands on Virgo and made an enemy of me. That's all that matters.

Also, I just plain don't like what he's done. Does having a sad backstory make it okay to oppress people? Don't make me laugh. Being noble comes with a degree of obligation, of duty. Nobles aren't there to oppress people. They're there to protect and govern them. It's true that We once committed evil deeds and took many lives. We even decimated people who opposed us and burned them to the ground. We won't deny that. But any person who takes away their people's happiness for sport is no longer a noble. They're just bastards with authority.

Emotion drained from Lufas with surprising speed, leaving only the coldheartedness of the Black-Winged Conqueror.

We just don't like this person from the bottom of our heart, so there's no need to hold back. There's only one thing We need to do.

Lufas reapplied Blunted-Sword Strike and punched with all her might.

She punched. Then punched and punched some more.

Punch. Punch. Punch. Punch.

Punchpunchpunchpunch! Punchpunchpunchpunch!

Lufas's fists, which displayed no pity or mercy, became a curtain of bullets numbering over hundreds of millions raining down on Debris in mere seconds. Head, face, chest, shoulder, arm, thigh, gut, leg, knee, crotch! She crushed every single part of him without fail! None of his teeth survived, whether they were the front teeth, canines, molars, or wisdom teeth! Everything was punched out of his mouth, his jaw was pulverized, and his eyes were destroyed along with the sockets housing them.

But the fists didn't stop.

Skull, facial bones, vertebrae, sternum, ribs! Shoulder blade, clavicle, upper arm bone, forearm bone, hipbone, wrist bone! Pelvis, thighbone, kneecap, lower leg bone, tarsus! Lufas destroyed every bone in his body down to the last

one.

Her fists, which could crack planets with a single strike, rained down on him in a shower of outrageous irrationality. Debris's mind gave out in an instant in the face of immense pain, but he couldn't die thanks to the skill Lufas was using. He was forced to live, his HP at 1.

"Get lost, servant."

Debris's right-hand man was stunned when Lufas caught him in the middle of trying something.

When Lufas's flurry ended, there was not a single point of Debris's body that was okay. At that point, he was only barely holding on to human form, or rather, he was *made* to hold on to human form thanks to the effects of a skill. The lump of meat that was Debris couldn't even let out a cry of pain, but one last full-on strike sent him flying grandly, and even that was denied by Lufas once again, who grabbed him by the neck and dragged him back.

While Blunted-Sword Strike was active, no one would be killed by Lufas's attacks. However, it wasn't such a powerful skill as to protect against anything other than that. If Lufas hadn't caught Debris just now, he would have been sent flying with the force of all the millions of blows he'd taken in the span of a second, traveling an equivalent distance. Not even Lufas knew how far he'd be sent flying, but there was no doubt he'd end up in space and die. Lufas tossed Debris to the side, but though the person herself had planned to do it lightly, it still contained inhuman force behind it.

Debris was sent burrowing into a wall, creating a tunnel several meters deep before stopping. The movement had been like tossing some trash on the floor into a garbage can. It had been that carefree. But the result was completely outrageous.

Seeing that, Debris's right-hand man went completely pale, realizing that he had zero chance of winning. After completely destroying the human named Debris, Lufas added a single note.

"Don't worry... We held back. He can spend what little time he has left regretting his life."

Sei and the others had gone uniformly pale as they looked up at Lufas silently. *Just where was this “holding back” you were talking about?* Sei thought.

10

In front of me was a man sitting with his legs folded under him in seiza... Rather, he was made to do so. He was the weak old man who served Debris, the noble who'd spouted nonsense in my face just now. His face, which was drooping and facing the ground, was beaten up and swollen. A stain spread out from his crotch and there was an accompanying puddle at his feet. It was filthy.

I stared at the man in silence for a moment. *I feel a little guilty about all this.*

Apparently he was, in fact, a powerless civilian. Just in case, I'd heard what he had to say, and it turned out he was just someone who had been forced to obey due to social standing. Therefore, I went really easy on him when I caught him, but he still ended up like this in the end. All I had done was lightly slap him around a bit though.

Well, anyway. He had been helping the villain, and there were surely plenty of girls who hadn't managed to get away thanks to him, so I decided to simply file it under just deserts.

By the way, I had only healed Debris enough so that he wouldn't die, so he was now on the floor just barely breathing. Of course, there was no telling what he'd do if I fully healed him, so I simply made sure he wouldn't die. He still hadn't changed from being some unexplainable object that just barely resembled a human. Of course, I had also taken the ring and had no plans on giving it back. It'd be like giving an ogre a club or an idiot a blade. There was no way giving it back to him would lead to something good.

Also, I made sure to heal all the victims, leaving no scars or other traces behind. I also called Dina over to erase the incident from their memories. There wasn't a single memory of this incident that they would benefit from having, after all. Something similar had happened before, but now that I thought back on it, those orcs could have even been considered gentlemanly. In other words,

Debris was worse than an orc.

I repaired Virgo's clothes too, of course.

"Do you swear to make amends to the victims?" I asked.

"I swear," said Debris's right-hand man.

"Good. But never show yourself to them. Their memories might return. Keep to helping them from the shadows. Understood?"

The man who had been employed as Debris's right hand seemed to at least feel some guilt for the many crimes he'd assisted with, so I had him promise to live to make amends.

Well, remorse alone didn't give him free license to do whatever he wanted, but he had been unable to defy Debris given his standing, so this man was also a victim of sorts. That was why I didn't think he deserved death, and it didn't feel right to brand him a criminal along with the Spess family.

As for the rest of the Spess family... Well, once these crimes came to light there was no doubt they'd be erased. I assumed the details would reach the royal family through either Gantz or the elf guy, so I figured that they would be stripped of their noble title eventually.

"Here. Can you stand?"

"Ah! Y-Yes! I—I-I'm fine!"

I helped a brown-haired girl who was still on the floor up to her feet and applied some healing heaven-arts to her. She was pretty roughed up, but now that she'd been healed, she shouldn't have any lasting marks.

That Debris guy really has fallen as a man to go this far against a girl. Look at how badly she's shaking and how afraid she is. Should I give him another hundred or so punches? I quietly considered the option. *Well, whatever. He'll get what he deserves later. Anymore than this will literally just be kicking a dead body.*

"Sorry for butting in. Our business here is done. The rest is up to you."

Like that, I left the rest up to the hero's party, and I made a quick escape. Of course, I took the girl Raile with me, as she was the subject of my quest. Her

burns had been completely healed. *Heaven-arts are seriously useful.*

“Miss Lufas, what kind of object is this ring?” Libra asked on the way back.

She was probably concerned as to why I had called it defective. It wasn’t really a secret, so I explained. “The ring’s effect is just as I said. But reducing the world’s speed by 10,000 would stop the user as well. In order to combat that, the user has to be given enough speed to overcome it. This means it forces the user’s time to speed up until it exceeds 10,000 so the user is able to move in a stopped world.”

“That’s...”

“Indeed. It would be no problem for someone like us, who reached this point on our own, but that wasn’t the case for him. Even then, the ring itself would take the burden of the increased ‘time’ while he had it, so it wasn’t a problem. However... Now that he doesn’t have the ring... Do you get it?”

The effect of the ring debuffed the entire world in addition to buffing the user. In numbers, it would be 10,000 both ways. It dropped the speed of the entire world to 0, stopping time. It was unbelievable, but it debuffed the concept of time itself.

As it stood though, that would stop the user too, so it also gave them enough speed to rip past such a barrier by accelerating the person themselves. Indeed, it was like cheating. If there wasn’t such a huge demerit, I would have wanted it for my Twelve Stars too. However... Once the user lost the ring, all the extra time came rushing back to them, returning to its original owner. It was an incredibly flawed object.

Of course, it wasn’t so kind as to just give back five seconds or something because the world had been stopped for that long. It was worse than that. It was said that a human’s walking speed was around five kilometers per hour. That noble was a resident of this world, so his physical abilities were higher than the people of Earth, but even then, it most likely wouldn’t exceed thirty kilometers per hour.

On the one hand, to reach time-stop—in other words, the “world where time is left behind,” that Benetnasch and I could reach—the speed required would be... Well, I’d never actually measured it, but given all-out running or flying with

compressed internal time, I'd be willing to bet you would need to be able to make a lap around Mizgarz within a second in real time. Therefore, I'd say that the speed of Benetnasch or myself during battle would be over Mach 100,000. *The numbers are so high it sounds like a joke, but let's just set that aside.*

This was where the problem started. Mach 1 is about 1,200 kilometers per hour, or so I've heard. It won't be completely accurate here since there are differences in atmospheric temperature and pressure, but it's close enough. With that metric, speeding up thirty kilometers per hour to Mach 100,000 would require you to multiply by four million. That meant the owner of this ring would experience four million times the time per second of stopped time... That would be over forty-six days of someone's lifespan for one second of time-stop.

Using the ring a couple times would probably be fine. It was a harsh price, but it wasn't unpayable. Stopping time for ten seconds in total would equal more than a year, but even that might be within acceptable limits. What if you repeated that over and over though? What if each usage stopped time for ten seconds, and you had used it every time something had come up? Stopping time for one minute would use up over seven years of your life span, which meant that if your total stopped time went over ten minutes, over seventy years would be gone.

From the looks of things, that spoiled brat relied on the ring pretty heavily. I didn't know how many times he'd used it, but I expected he was an old geezer right about now. *Wait, is that being too generous?* Anyway, this ring was like trading in your future for a win now.

The only ones who could use this with no demerit would be me, the Devil King, and Benetnasch... What should I do with it? It might be fun to use it as materials for a golem. As I was now, making a golem stronger than Libra wouldn't be impossible. At any rate, there was no doubt the ring was defective, but that didn't mean it was useless. *Let's just keep it for now.*

After that, we made it back to the inn. The owner thanked us so profusely that it actually got a little annoying. This just showed how much he must have cared for that woman named Raile. Of course, we never told him the full details of what had happened. We just told him that she had been put to sleep after she'd been taken. Well, it was true that a hand had never been laid on her, so

that wasn't a lie.

Anyway, that was over. What was more important now was food. There were several dishes full of way too gorgeously decorated food lined up in front of me giving off steam. It kind of seemed like there were too many, but there were a lot of us too. We'd probably be able to finish them all.

I picked a dish out of the lineup and took it. It was a large bone which was surrounded by thick meat, and it was well-cooked all the way through.

So manga meat actually exists...

I took a bite, ripping some meat away, and felt my mouth filling with umami and meat juices. The flavor was unfamiliar to me though. It felt good to bite into. The meat was a little tough, but overall, it was great. It tasted kind of close to chicken, but this was definitely different.

While savoring each bite, I suddenly thought of a fake dragon with wings. That thought led into a scene where a somewhat younger-looking Megrez and the faces of the now-deceased Alioth and Mizar were enjoying camping together with the old Lufas. Near them was the carcass of a wyvern that they'd hunted being cooked over a fire.

Ah, I see... This is wyvern meat. Even though it's just a fake dragon, this isn't the first time I've eaten one. So wyverns taste like chicken. I'm definitely not put off by that though. In fact, I quite like this taste. Seems like it'd go well with some mayonnaise.

With thoughts like that floating through my mind, I continued to enjoy my lunch. However, that temporary enjoyment was brought to a halt by Dina, who suddenly stood up.

"What's wrong, Dina?"

"I need to go wash my hands."

Oh, she just needs to go.

I watched as Dina hurriedly ran off before I went back to my wyvern meat. However, Castor was the next to stand up, so fiercely this time he kicked the seat away, and the meal was once again interrupted.

Huh? Does he need the toilet too? I thought, but Castor's face was dead serious. He was sweating, and his face looked more grim than I'd ever seen it. *Hmm, it doesn't look like...he's holding it in.*

"This feeling... No, Pollux? But why...? She should never leave Alfheim..."

Pollux? That's the name of the other Twin, the little sister, right? According to Parthenos, the Twins had been tasked with sealing another ouroboros, but Castor didn't seem like he had anything to do with that. The fact that he was here in the first place was strange. That meant the job of sealing the ouroboros would naturally be left to his little sister. *Sounds like something happened to her.*

Just like that, Castor took off and left the inn. I couldn't help but be taken aback and left speechless.

Well, uh... I guess I should follow him for now.

* *

"Truly, like a storm," Sargess muttered following a moment of silence after Lufas left.

His words sounded painfully sincere, speaking to the feelings of everyone in the room. What was a fearsome item to them was merely a defective one to Lufas, and what stood as a tough enemy to Sei and the others was just a weak old man to her. She most likely never even noticed that the man still sitting in seiza was strong enough to be treated as a top-class fighter in this world. Actually, whether she even registered him as a fighter was still up in the air... To her, the difference between a civilian and Debris's right-hand man was like the difference between a regular ant and a slightly stronger ant. There was no way she could tell the difference. Even a light slap that almost seemed like she was petting a lovely small animal had jarred Debris's right-hand man's face and neck so much they looked like they would come off. The fact that he'd swelled up so quickly was so shocking it surpassed fear, and almost made those who watched want to let out a weird, small laugh.

Sei had once questioned the trope in games where the player couldn't run away from the boss, but now he understood. *Ah, nope. Impossible. There's no running away from that. She just lives in a different time frame. The second you*

try to run, she'll already have grabbed you from behind by the neck. There's seriously nothing to be done.

Sei was quiet, then muttered, "I'm so pathetic," as he looked down at his hands.

He knew he was weak. Even so, he hadn't thought it was too serious a problem, since he'd been too isolated by Lufas and the rest of the people he interacted with. It was only natural to feel weak in front of things like tornadoes, earthquakes, and meteors. No human would consider weakness in the face of those things a serious problem. Who would look at the sun and think, "Why am I so weak when the sun is so big and strong?"

But today was different. Sei had been confronted with reality. He couldn't even hold a candle to another human, the same as he was. He was confronted with the fact that he was weak and pathetic. He'd proved an easy mark to be taken hostage, let alone being strong enough to protect someone from those with evil intent.

More than anything else, Sei couldn't forgive his own weakness. He felt the desire to become strong more keenly than ever before. The method to do so was right in front of him. If he could somehow get Lufas to give him one of the golden apples only she could make, he could easily become strong enough to be ranked among the top of the world. The only question was whether or not that was the right thing to do. To Sei, it seemed too easy.

Lufaemonnn, I wanna be strooong! Okay! Here's a golden apple! Yayyyy! Level 1000, here I come!

Sei's thoughts stalled as he silently considered it. *Could I really be called strong if I do that? Could I really be proud of my strength that way? Would I grow arrogant and spoiled by gaining power so easily? Am I confident that I won't turn out like Debris?* There was no better way to warp a person than to give them easily obtained power. In that sense, golden apples were truly forbidden fruit. They would lead humans down the wrong path.

I want to become strong... Yeah, I want that from the bottom of my heart. But using that alone to justify using golden apples makes me hesitate.

In the end, that was the reason Sei had yet to breach the topic to Lufas even

once. There was no real reason for it. He was just scared to be wrong. He was scared to step onto the wrong path. Being wrong was a source of fear for Sei, since it might affect others as well as himself. The more power there was involved, the larger the effects of any mistakes.

Talking in extremes, if Sei made a mistake and swung with all his might, hitting the ground, he might make a hole or something at most. If Lufas were to do the same thing, it would result in untold casualties. She might even accidentally split the planet in two.

The truth is that a single human can gain the strength to affect the entire world. There's no way such a thing should be treated lightly, and I shouldn't think of it that way either. If I were to gain all that power...would I be able to use it correctly? Do I have that qualification? Sei could not find the answer within himself.

"Is something wrong, Sir Sei?"

Petto turned his cute round eyes upwards, looking at Sei with worry since he was so quiet. Sei, however, made like there was nothing wrong.

"N-No, nothing's wrong."

Sei then silently went and moved the dumb dog, who was pissing on Debris's face, before warning him not to pee on people. Then, he turned to Alfie.

"Um... Uh, sorry. I wasn't too much help."

"What? If it weren't for you, I'd have been caught in that alley, and who knows what I'd be like right now. I'm grateful, Sei." Alfie smiled as she thanked him.

She looked away, turned her eyes back to Sei, and then looked away again. It seemed as if she had something she wanted to say but couldn't quite work up the courage to say it. Eventually though, she braced herself and gazed straight at Sei.

"And, um... Uh, if you're okay with it... And if everyone else is okay with it too... Ummm... I know it's really selfish of me to say this, but I could join you guys again..."

Alfie fidgeted restlessly as she talked, but in the middle of all that the idiot dog with too much time on its hands started playing with Sargess, which caused his robe to fall away. And what was revealed to everyone was a spider!

Alfie paled instantly seeing that, and she went fully silent. She'd already figured that Sargess was some sort of demihuman, but they'd fought together, and she actually thought of his personality favorably. She didn't hate him... She definitely didn't.

However, some humans will be forever bad at dealing with certain things. There are some who just cannot handle cockroaches, and those who just can't stomach spiders. That was just how it was here. Alfie just couldn't accept the appearance of spiders as a species. It wasn't a matter of whether or not Sargess was a threat, and it didn't matter if he was venomous or not. Unfortunately, she struck out right from the start at his appearance. Just by looking at him, Alfie got goosebumps, and she couldn't stop sweating.

For a long while, Alfie was silent. "Sorry. Forget what I just said..."

Just like that, a recently raised flag was instantly crushed.

11

"gasp ... gasp ...!"

In the sky some ways away from Alfheim, a male and female pair of devilfolk were desperately flying. Well, technically, they weren't both flying. It would be more accurate to say that the man—Terra—was flying by himself while holding Luna. There was a large gap in levels between Terra and Luna, and it was much faster for Terra to carry her than for Luna to fly herself. Of course, it needn't be said that doing so meant Terra would be slowed, and they were being chased by a terrifying pursuer.

It was 170 meters in length, and it weighed 180,000 tonnes. It was clad in jet-black scales, and every time its gigantic wings flapped, they whipped up a storm. It had a total of ten heads that boasted powerful, unparalleled might, each of those heads the equal of ten normal dragons. In the past, it used to be

called “the dragon with a hundred heads.” It was a monster that had disappeared from the world already, exterminated more than two hundred years ago.

In the past, it had controlled over twenty percent of the world, and it stood at the peak of all dragons, who were said to be the embodiment of power. It was counted among the four strongest pillars of the world along with the Vampire Princess, the Lion King, and the Devil King. Before Lufas Maphaahl had come along and killed it, it had plumbed the depths of tyranny as it pleased because it was considered invincible.

Its name was the Dragon King Ladon. The monster had disappeared from the living world long ago, but now it was back and roaring mightily. Riding on top of such a monster was the Fairy Princess Pollux, and she was looking down upon Terra and Luna with an ice-cold gaze.

“Sir Terra! I’ll serve as bait, so please leave me and run!” cried Luna.

“No,” Terra replied. “You will not even be able to be bait.”

“But!”

“Just be quiet, and hold on tight!”

Pollux’s rampage had been completely unexpected by Terra. As for why things had turned out like this, he had figured it out thanks to what Pollux had shouted to him last; the Goddess had made some sort of play, and Pollux was now being controlled. Because if that wasn’t the case, she wouldn’t have been able to make use of the Dragon King, even if she was the Fairy Princess.

It was true that, with her ability, summoning and thus reviving the Dragon King wouldn’t be impossible. However, the ability was to “summon heroes.” The Dragon King was a destroyer who was diametrically opposed to those who would be considered heroes, so he did not fit within the ability’s conditions. At the very least, it was unthinkable that Pollux thought of Ladon as a hero.

Also, even if she did manage to summon him, she wouldn’t be able to make use of him. If the legends were correct, then the Dragon King Ladon was even more tyrannical than the Lion King Leon. Ladon just didn’t have the kind of personality of someone who would listen to others, but right now, Pollux was

using the Dragon King. It followed her as if it didn't have any ego at all.

As for a being that could make that happen... Well, there was only one in all of Mizgarz. Yes—only the Goddess of Creation, Alovenus, was capable of such a feat, and her objective was most likely to defeat Lufas Maphaahl. In order to accomplish that, she'd make use of the strongest piece available to her at the moment.

"Poor, pitiful children of the devil. Be calm. Stop your resistance to the inevitable. I do not intend to kill you. I simply desire another card to use against Orm. If you will subject yourselves to me, I will guarantee your safety."

"Well that's great...! But unfortunately, I don't think I'd work as a hostage to my father!"

"No, no. You are quite wrong about that." Someone who wasn't Pollux was borrowing her mouth to talk. The person sounded soft, and just hearing that voice felt comforting and relaxing, even though there was no reason for it.

However, Terra was convinced. He knew that if he were to give in to these feelings of relief and relaxation, all that awaited them was destruction. Her words made him truly feel at ease; just like a mother's lullaby, it stripped him of all wariness. That was scarier than anything else.

Also, if they were to get caught here, Terra wouldn't be able to face Pollux, who'd struggled so much. *Struggle... Yes, she's still fighting in there. If she wasn't... We would already have disappeared, especially Luna.*

If the devilfolk were a spell cast by the Goddess, then it should have been easy for her to dispel them as well. But given how that hadn't happened yet, as well as the fact that she wanted a card to play against his father, Terra figured that at the moment, the Goddess was in an incomplete state where she was unable to bring her omnipotence and omniscience to bear.

She's just hijacking Pollux's consciousness, possessing her. That's why we're still alive. No, "possessing" isn't quite accurate. I'd guess that Pollux isn't even being possessed right now. It seems to me like the Goddess is moving a piece on a board. Pollux is acting like a puppet who's being controlled, while the controller uses her as a mouthpiece.

If Lufas had been here, she'd probably point out that it was like moving a character in a TRPG.

"Capture them," Pollux ordered.

The countless dragons behind her accelerated at once. They were the army of dragons that Lufas had eliminated in the past. However, they had now gained temporary bodies and had descended upon the present. Each one of them was a monster possessing extraordinary strength.

Terra would have been able to take on about five of them at once, but anymore than that was a tough thing to ask for, especially since he was protecting Luna. Terra desperately avoided the crowd of dragons that attacked them, pulling off amazing acrobatic flight maneuvers in order to shake them off. Meanwhile, he tightly hugged the existence he had to protect in his arms close to his chest so as to not drop her as she tried to make herself as small as possible.

If Terra had been alone here, he would have drawn his sword to bat them away or counterattack, and in doing so he might have been able to get away. Of course, the possibility of that happening was a mere one percent, but it was indeed possible. However, the current situation Terra found himself in was impossibly disadvantageous; not even that small possibility existed.

"So you wish to be captured along with the girl, I see. You are truly orthodox and just my type... But that is something that should be done by the hero, not by someone like you."

The words were spoken by someone with a far higher vantage point, and they sounded unreasonable in the extreme. However, she had the right to say those things because she had power.

The Dragon King's ten heads writhed as they opened their large mouths in Terra's direction. Each of those mouths unleashed a powerful fire so destructive that every one of them could destroy a city on their own.

"I can hold back to some degree... But don't die, will you?"

The giant stream of flames hit Terra's back.

* *

“We’re going in the right direction, yes?”

“Yes. My little sister is coming.”

Several minutes had passed since Castor had flown off. We were now far outside the city, looking at an unfamiliar sky. Apparently, Castor had sensed that his other half, the Fairy Princess, had left her spot for some reason and was coming towards us. It was probably some sort of twin synchronization thing, and it didn’t seem like Castor was wrong. I could also feel something dangerous coming this way through the prickling of my skin.

I took off my glasses and undid the bandages hiding my wings.

I had Virgo wait in the inn. She most likely wouldn’t be able to keep up with the battle that was about to happen, and having someone at least somewhat skilled behind us in town would allow us to worry less as we fought. I had left Dina behind too, as she hadn’t come back from the restroom yet.

Of course, things would be best if it never turned into a fight. The absolute best outcome would be a silly one, where she’d just come to speak with me for some reason, and I’d just happened to be too cautious. So for the moment, I simply assumed that I *was* being too cautious. She was a member of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, after all. It was weirder to assume there would be a fight.

But, I wonder... Something inside me was sure that this would not turn out so peacefully. I didn’t know which organ between my brain and my heart housed my mind and which housed my soul, but both of those were screaming at me to get ready for a fight. It most likely originated from “Lufas’s” instinct, something mysterious and immeasurable she’d gained through throwing herself into battle.

Instinct alone might have been unreliable, but for some reason, I was able to put my full trust in my instincts right now. It wasn’t just me either. Aries, Libra, Aigokeros, Scorpius, Karkinos, Sagittarius, and Castor were already prepared for battle, each one of them seemingly ready for anything. As things stood, we would be intercepting Pollux with everyone, but I didn’t think that was too much. Something inside me was sounding the alarm with all its might, shouting that the coming fight would surely be even more dangerous than the ones with Benetnasch and Leon.

“Heaven-arts: Heliopause and Heliosphere.”

I circulated divine power all around Laegjarn, covering it in a protective physical barrier.

Heliopause was a barrier that completely shut out any physical damage below a certain threshold and was mainly useful against opponents and abilities that dealt fixed damage. However, its limit was (Player level + Priest level) * 10, which meant my Heliopause wouldn't do anything against values over 10,500. It might be a mediocre value, but it wouldn't be useless.

In the game, there was a monster that would use a skill called “Swallow Ten Thousand Needles” repeatedly from many directions to deal a fixed 10,000 damage with each use, and in cases like those, this skill was perfect. Depending on the target's HP, it would also defend against Mesarthim if the damage was low enough.

Given all that, the overall impression of this spell was... Well, it was better than nothing. However, in this case, it would serve to protect against any adverse effects of our fight. It would easily break if we were to attack it directly, but in that case, Karkinos would just have to do his job.

I already explained Heliosphere's effects, but just in case, it's a spell to defend against magic. By deploying it inside the barrier erected by Heliopause, it could also work to block stray spells.

As an aside, absolute physical defense did exist in *Exgate Online*, and I could use it. However, that effect didn't exist in any skills or heaven-arts that I could use on all of my friends. Also, enemies usually had piercing skills in order to counter absolute defense skills, so they were surprisingly useless. I'd been so happy when I'd first gotten one, thinking, *Now I'm invincible!*, but in the next fight, I'd been easily pierced by an enemy. *I'll never forget that.*

“Sagittarius,” I called out.

“Yes!”

He instantly let an arrow fly with no hesitation. I grabbed the arrow of light, which had no physical form, and immediately activated my skill.

“Enchant Ray.”

Enchant Ray was a buff that enhanced an ally's attack and defense abilities.

Then, Sagittarius added in his unique skill. Its name was Ascella. Its effect was to take a skill, spell, or heaven-art that only targeted a single target, and make it apply to all enemies. Of course, it would lower in power compared to its original state, but it was pretty nice if you thought of the savings you got over having to cast or use something again for the entire party. Well, a certain nationally famous RPG had the feature to turn anything multi-target by pressing the L button, so compared to that, it didn't sound too powerful. It was still very convenient though. Also, there was the option to use an absolute physical defense skill and then change the target to all of Laegjarn...but as was mentioned before, absolute physical defense was as easily countered as it was powerful, so I didn't opt for that.

I grabbed the arrow and threw it. When I did so, the arrow split, each one stabbing into all of the Twelve Heavenly Stars here and raising their abilities.

"Skill: Tegmine!" Karkinos activated his skill, raising his defenses even further.

Now then, this should have us ready for now. I crossed my arms, waiting for what was to come.

That was when an unexpected male-female devilfolk pair came to us. *If I remember right, he should be the Devil King's son who I saw once in Blutgang... I believe his name is Terra?* He was carrying a girl in his arms, and they were running desperately from something. They were covered in wounds all over; it looked quite painful.

Are they the reason for the alarms that are sounding off inside me? I considered this for a moment. *No, they aren't. I do feel that they are a tiny bit threatening, but they aren't what I'm wary of.*

"He is..."

"The Devil King's son, I believe. Should I erase them?" asked Aigokeros.

Having seen them, I stopped Aigokeros, who was about to attack. For now, I decided to observe the situation. "No, wait. Something doesn't seem right."

After I stopped Aigokeros, Terra fell in front of me, and the girl in his arms also fell to the ground. However, she wasn't seriously hurt. It was clear that

Terra must have protected her with his life.

“Sir Terra! Sir Terraaaa!”

The girl cried as she shook Terra, but there was no response. I stepped forward, placing myself in front of her. When I did, the girl (*I believe her name is Luna?*) stood in front of Terra, trying to protect him. *How noble. Even though she knows she has no chance...* I tried glaring at her, eliciting a flinch and some trembling from the girl. Even then, she showed no signs of moving.

After a pause, she stuttered, “P-Please... I don’t care what happens to me... Just let Sir Terra go.”

“Oh? How convenient for you. We have no reason or obligation to do that for you though.”

“I-I’ll do... I’ll do anything you want... Please!”

Hmm? She just offered to do anything? Leaving jokes like that aside, what should I do? Oh, it looks like I’ll have to decide what to do with them later. Seems like the threat I was waiting for is here.

The subject of my internal alarm flew at surprising speed until it got in front of me. It appeared in an instant, as if it had warped, and it looked like a giant dragon. The monster possessed ten heads, and for some reason, it seemed familiar to me. In a flash, my mind reminded me of its name, which I considered quietly. *The Dragon King Ladon, huh? If I remember right, it should be a final boss from an event in the game. It dropped a lot of valuable alchemical mats on defeat, and I remember using the drops to make Amritas.*

Then, there was the girl with honey-colored hair who was standing on top of it. *I’m pretty sure that she’s the Fairy Princess Pollux.*

Pollux and I locked eyes, and the Fairy Princess smiled softly. “I see. So you’re the Black-Winged Conqueror. I’ve known of you for a while now, but this is the first time we’re speaking like this, isn’t it?”

I considered her words silently before asking, “You are not Pollux, are you?”

“Correct. I’m only borrowing her body for a little while.”

Someone who wasn’t Pollux was borrowing her mouth to speak. If it was

Pollux, she wouldn't have claimed this was the first time we were speaking. Probably, anyway. In truth, this was the first time I was meeting her, but from her perspective, Lufas Maphaahl should already have been familiar. So there was only one answer. Just like how I wasn't Lufas, she wasn't Pollux, and there weren't many who could pull off something like controlling Pollux.

If my predictions were correct, I was talking to my greatest enemy.

"I've been wanting to talk to you... But before that, let's have these unnecessary things swept from the stage."

Pollux looked down at Terra and Luna, and a warrior wearing a full suit of armor stepped down from the dragon and moved towards them. I paused. *He's pretty strong. Level 750, huh?* The warrior lifted up his sword, and Luna covered Terra with her body, trying to act as a shield. The warrior had no killing intent though. The plan was probably to lop off an arm or a leg and simply capture them.

I took a step and got between the warrior and the devilfolk, catching his raised blade with my bare hands.



Luna seemed shocked.

Given who they were, the two devilfolk were my enemies, so I had no reason to save them, but... Well, they seemed somehow different from the devilfolk I'd met up till now. *It's too early to erase them, I think. It should be fine to listen to them and decide whether to kill them afterward.*

"Devilfolk girl, do not forget what you said earlier."

I made sure to drive that home just in case before I put power into the hand holding the blade. I never intended to have her do anything exceptionally strange though. NTR is not to my taste. For now, if I managed to make her owe me, then she might be useful later. That was as far as I'd bothered to think on it.

Using my grip strength, I destroyed the sword before sending the surprised armored warrior flying with a kick. Just that caused an explosive sound as the armor warped, and he dragged another down with him as they were both sent tailspinning into the horizon. *Oh ho, how light.*

"I agree with you, Not-Pollux. Those who are unnecessary *should* leave the stage. You need to go away," I said, smiling belligerently as I activated a skill I'd just learned recently.

12

The skill Alkaid was a skill that surely should not normally exist in this world. It was only natural, given how bugged this skill was. It destroyed the level 1000 ceiling, which had been set in place by the Goddess who created the world, after all. The skill, which I learned—no, remembered—during the fight with Benetnasch, allowed me to surpass level 1000 and soar into the world beyond.

I felt uplifted, elated as my mentality turned more warlike, leaning towards a violent state where I could gravely hurt my opponent with no qualms. I stopped being me and changed into us. However, it seemed like I couldn't expect such a drastic gain in strength as last time, as our level stopped at 1500. *It's lower than expected, but it's still enough.*

The levels of the Twelve Stars also jumped, having been pulled up by our own. Only Libra's level did not rise, but she had her own way to power up.

“Armament Selection! Astraia!”

The additional equipment came flying from Blutgang, docking with Libra in midair.

With this, everyone but Libra was at level 1000, and Libra herself was fully armed. On the other side, the enemy had several hundred bodies between levels 700-1000. With the Dragon King in the mix, the difference in combined might between the two sides would probably be laughably large.

At least, it normally would... But I am not to be underestimated. The Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars were comprised of the best of the best, gathered by us in order to combat the Goddess. I wouldn't have added anyone who wouldn't be able to overturn an advantage of just this scale.

True, the difference was huge given our overall combined levels. Counting us, our levels would only be 7600. On the other side, their forces probably easily surpassed several hundred thousand in levels. But it was unfortunate as our levels didn't add, they multiplied. Now that We'd regained some of our original might, the Twelve Stars could finally exert their full power.

Sorry for everything up until now. Our uselessness has forced you all to fight all this time while so constrained. But there's no need to worry anymore. Our chains are gone. So...

“To all the Stars of Conquest who serve us, We order you: now is the time to enchant us with your full power.”

Argonautai? Never mind any of the elite who served under us two hundred years ago. We only see innocuous “heroes” who feared rebellion. With just them, the argonautai are nothing more than a jumble of fighters. It looks like some of those who'd followed the Seven Heroes are there...but don't make us laugh. They're nothing special.

It was said that they had combined their might to take us down, but that was completely wrong. The truth was that they had just been a group of cowards who'd done nothing but commit themselves to long-range support fire. They

had pushed the job of fighting us onto Alioth and the others while they had stood back in safety and plinked away. They were just a gathering of weaklings. *How was it at the end? We tried to remember. Right, We remember. It should be that they were so annoying that We simply burned them all away.*

“Your legs are shaking, heroes. Do you still fear us, even after death?”

“H-How dare you...!”

“Ah, by the way—you. Who are you again? We do not remember your name or face at all. Forgive us, will you? We seem to be birdbrained enough to forget those who don’t leave an impression after three steps.”

“Wha—... Wh—...?!”

The faces of the heroes twisted in anger and shame at our ridicule.

Well, this should do it for provocation. Though it is true that We don’t remember each of their faces. Honestly, they aren’t worth remembering. In the end, they were just small fry who raised only their levels with golden apples. Do a bunch of people who lost to us two hundred years ago really think they can get together like they have a grudge and win as long as they form a united front? Nothing changes by having them come back from the afterlife. Returning monsters being weak is a huge trope, so they should just leave already.

“Skill: Ex-Coalesce.”

Of course, We were the same in the department of being able to do things We hadn’t been able to before. We were in possession of several skills that could only be obtained with special combinations, and one of them was the skill Ex-Coalesce. Its power was as you could see. The condition to learn it was to have both the Monster Tamer and Alchemist classes at a combined level of 200 or more, and its effect was to fuse skills.

Take, for example, a skill that stunned the enemy on a crit and a skill that would always crit on a hit activating at the same time. The end result would be to “always stun the enemy.” Normally, this skill had to be activated by both the Tamer and the Tamer’s monster, but this world had no such restriction. In the game, this skill only worked with certain combinations of skills, but that didn’t matter anymore. Fusion of any two skills We could think to combine was

possible.

We don't care about any rules the Goddess makes, and We have no need to follow them. We make our own rules. You can burn the image of the Twelve Heavenly Stars' full might into your eyes. We paused. Won't you, Alovenus?

* *

As soon as Lufas had given her orders, the Twelve Stars made their move. Their bodies were filled to the brim with power, and their master's voice was like a tailwind. The possibility of defeat never entered into their minds. There was nothing but total belief in their victory. After all, they had the unbeatable Black-Winged King behind them, and they had been commanded to enchant her. What member of the Twelve Stars wouldn't answer such an order? What kind of servants would they be if they didn't?

In front of a force more than ten times their number, Aries and the others showed not even the slightest hint of fear as they used the skills that best suited them.

"Let's go, Libra, Scorpius!" Sagittarius called out.

"Don't order me around!" Scorpius said.

"I'll follow your lead!" answered Libra.

The heroic spirits who opposed them probably saw the moment the constellations of the Archer, the Scales, and the Scorpion shined behind Sagittarius, Libra, and Scorpius, as well as the moment the constellations combined.

"Fly!"

First, Sagittarius let fly an arrow which Libra grabbed onto, teleporting her to the center of the enemy formation. Just when all the attention was on her, Scorpius unleashed her poison breath attack, Grafias, bathing all the enemies along with Libra in her deadly poison. However, the poison had no effect on Libra. Obviously it wouldn't, since she wasn't a living being in the first place.

The poisoned heroic spirits were then trapped in a field of light that had been deployed in an instant before being hit by the Scales's skill. It was a bright flash

that would not allow any weaklings to escape destruction. Its name was...

“Brachium!”

It was a lavish usage of the skill, activating such a destructive ability first on a large scale.

In the face of that attack, which boasted the highest firepower out of anything the Twelve Heavenly Stars was able to bring to bear, all the rank and file soldiers with less than 99,999 HP were one-sidedly erased. Absolute defense skills meant nothing, and absolute evasion skills were totally ignored. The light of decimation was a blow of selection by the one who had guarded the Goddess’s Sanctuary. It had a higher priority than all the skills it pierced through, and as a skill, it was of the highest rank. Its damage hit the cap of 99,999, and even blunting the damage was impossible.

Just this one attack reduced the numbers of the argonautai until less than twenty percent of them were left, but they had no time to be relieved that the attack was over.

“Aigokeros!”

“Let’s go, Aries!”

Next, Aries and Aigokeros stood, covering each other’s backs and overlapping their constellations of the Goat and the Ram. Aries had rainbow-colored flames erupting from every part of his body. Those flames were then gathered by a black, pulsating wave from Aigokeros, turning the flames black before spreading them throughout the surrounding area. The combined effect gave all those affected continuing ticks of percentile damage which was cursed to prevent healing. In other words, the flames not only ignored defenses and damaged all enemies no matter who they were, but they also prevented healing that damage. In effect, they were reducing the maximum HP of the enemy, and the heroic spirits who were burned by the flame fell one after the other.

“What’re you all doing?! There are less than ten of them!”

“Attack them! Crush them with numbers!”

The heroic spirits weren’t sitting still either. The dragons who were resurrected and still desired the title of strongest unleashed their breath

attacks, and a level 1000 swordmaster let loose a slash that split the earth. However, all those attacks were blocked by the wall of the Twelve Stars, Karkinos. Using Covering, he received all the attacks, grinning widely.

“Welcome to Hell! Are you ready, Sagittarius?!”

“Leave it to me!”

Sagittarius activated Ascella and imbued Karkinos with its effects. At the same time, the constellations of the Crab and the Archer intersected, and Karkinos’s counter reached even the spirits who hadn’t attacked him.

“Acubens Extension!”

The skill returned the damage dealt twice over to all the enemy combatants. Normally, Karkinos could only attack at close range, but now, with Lufas’s encouragement melded with Sagittarius’s skill, he had no such restrictions. The swipe Karkinos made with his scissors released a spread of light arrows which rampaged through the enemy formation. This absurd counter shaved away even more at the heroic spirits’ numbers, but the nightmare still wasn’t over. The party had just started.

“Make sure you keep up with me, Karkinos!” yelled Scorpius.

“O K A Y!”

Both Scorpius and Karkinos brandished their scissors together, attacking a gigantic dragon with their weapons. What they unleashed was a storm of slashes at super high speed. As those who used the same weapon type, they somehow ended up being able to combo well with each other. The dragon, which should have been equipped with tough scales, was instantly reduced to ribbons, becoming a miserable pile of meat.

“Sagittarius, back me up!” said Libra.

“I knew you’d be coming,” Sagittarius said. “I’m ready!”

The next constellations to intersect were the Scales and the Archer. Libra brought all her cannons to bear while Sagittarius aimed his bow. Then they attacked, letting arrows fly and unleashing storms of destructive light. Thanks to the effects of Ascella, the light from Libra’s cannons and the arrow from

Sagittarius's bow split, scattering over a wide area. Several thousand—no, tens of thousands—of ranged attacks burned their way through the field, mowing down all the enemies before the two could see.

“Aigokeros!”

“Understood!”

Castor stabbed his well-used anchor lance into the ground, generating a tornado. The heroic spirits who were swept up in it were then hit by a series of dark flashes originating from above them. But things weren't over. Right before they fell back down, Aries charged into them, having turned into a giant ball of fire. He hit them back up into the air instead of allowing them to fall to the ground, continuing the combo. From there, Aries released fire from his palms and took flight, kicking an enemy away before continuing on to repeat his attack on the next ones. When he finally landed and allowed the spirits to fall, Libra, Sagittarius, Scorpius, Castor, and Aigokeros were all waiting for them.

“We'll attack them all at once. Are you ready?”

“Who do you think you're talking to? I can turn you into scrap if you'd like.”

“Match my timing.”

“We're going to mow them all down at once!”

Libra brought her cannons to bear, while Scorpius sucked in a huge breath. Aigokeros's eyes glinted, and Castor lifted up his anchor. Aries gathered his flames, while Sagittarius readied his bow. They all unleashed their attacks at the same time, and even though the heroic spirits had already died once, they could foresee their upcoming death.

“Full salvo!”

“Grafias!”

“Deneb Algedi!”

“Gods of Fifty Names!”

“Mesarthim Version Three!”

“Al Nassr!”

The six attacks mixed together, combining due to Lufas's skill and becoming an extreme light that could not miss which pierced through what was left of the enemy formation. On the other hand, the Crab—who had no skills that could attack proactively—had no role to play, so he just threw his scissors.

Wherever the light touched, it left no heroic spirits standing. In the end, only the Dragon King and the Fairy Princess standing on top of it were left, but the princess didn't look perturbed by that in the slightest. The Fairy Princess snapped her fingers, and all the heroic spirits who had just been defeated came back, standing in the way of the Twelve Stars once again.

But that only made Lufas break into a full-faced smile. "Hmm. Then next it is our turn to enchant all of you," she muttered, moving her fingers.

When she did, all the recently resummoned heroic spirits floated up into the air and were stabbed with powerful psychic force without being able to offer up any resistance. Then, Lufas held up her hand, gathering shining golden mana to a point beside her. The mana formed a shining golden bow of the sun, though its size was far too huge for her, and it was doubtful any arrow large enough to be used by it existed.

However, what it fired didn't necessarily have to be an arrow. The effect of the spell was rather unusual for an attribute's greatest spell in that it didn't directly attack an enemy. Instead, it was more of a support spell. The spell multiplied the strength of the next spell by several times based on the time it took to fire, which meant that the bow would be firing a spell instead of an arrow.

"'Prophet Who Nocks the Golden Bow'! And burn them to cinders, Solar Flare!"

Along with Lufas's declaration came the launch of an attack spell that ranked in the upper echelons of what the Sun element was able to achieve in terms of heat and destructive power. The miniature golden sun that was unleashed swallowed up the heroic spirits before flying quickly out of the stratosphere and into the void of space. The speed of the spell surpassed the speed of light, and all the enemies that were hit by it were forcefully carried off into a distant star system.

But that wasn't all. The solar flare was buffed by the effects of Prophet Who Nocks the Golden Bow, which increased its scale as well. It grew to over one hundred meters in diameter, then one kilometer, then ten kilometers, then one hundred kilometers before eventually completing its transformation into a pseudo star the size of a small planet, possessing such high gravity and heat that even real stars couldn't compare. It consumed and crushed the numerous satellites, comets, and planets in its way before going supernova in far-off space.

No argonautai could withstand that, no matter how famously strong they were. Even a normal solar flare would have evaporated almost all of them, but instead, they were carried off into the ends of space before being caught up in the supernova of a miniature star. There were several elite spirits with over 99,999 HP, and ninety percent of the dragons had over 100,000 health as well. But even then... Even then, they were destroyed with a single spell.

"Now then, that should be enough, Goddess. No matter how many numbers you gather around you, it will not be enough to defeat us."

"Looks like it. My word, your monstrosity is exasperating. You even ignore the damage cap. How does that happen?"

The Goddess's words just now answered the mystery from earlier. Yes, while under the effects of Alkaid, Lufas ignored the damage ceiling. The Goddess had just witnessed the ridiculous damage numbers that Lufas had hit the heroic spirits with, which were in the hundreds of thousands. However, even that didn't cause the Goddess to lose composure, and there was a reason for that.

"You haven't forgotten, right? There exist heroic spirits who managed to defeat you before."

Pollux smiled and once again summoned spirits, but she didn't summon a crowd of soldiers like before. Instead, she summoned four stars who equaled Lufas in brilliance. They stood on the same level as the Vampire Princess, and two hundred years ago, they had put a stop to the Great Conqueror's ambitions. They were the strongest heroes in history.

The first to appear was a peerless warrior in armor. He was the Sword King Alioth, who had polished his skills with the sword to such a degree that he even

surpassed Lufas in that respect. Next was a polar bear beastfolk who was covered in white fur, Dubhe. The third was Mizgarz's best alchemist, who wore a full suit of armor, Mizar. The last to appear was the Adventure King Phecda, whose small stature belied his combat ability.

They had once been hailed as part of the Seven Heroes. Now, they had returned to the living world with their weapons pointed at Lufas.

13

"All of you..."

At the moment, We were experiencing some amount of surprise along with a strong sense of nostalgia. The four men standing in front of us were all of different races: a human, a beastfolk, a dwarf, and a halfling. We should have had no memory of those figures as they pointed their swords at us, but the "Lufas" inside our memories insisted that they were familiar, and at the same time, We felt anger strong enough that it burned us from the inside out. We had to wring out our sense of reason to its fullest to contain the sudden onslaught of rage, but We couldn't help but clench our fists just seeing them.

We weren't actually mad that they had defeated us. We didn't hold a grudge about that in any way. *But We wonder why...* Why couldn't We stop our rage seeing their wretched forms? Why did We feel so disappointed at how they looked, seemingly not in their right mind as they were being controlled?

We tensed as Alioth made his move.

The swordsman Alioth kicked off the ground, managing to step in right in front of us. We caught the blade he swung with the edge of our hand. The blade bit into flesh and drew blood. *Tch...! He's worthy of the title of Sword King. What a sharp edge.*

We swiped with our arm, shoving the sword to the side before plucking out a feather from our own black wings and throwing it quill-first at Alioth's eye. With that, We backstepped and created some space before healing the wound on our hand. Alioth also plucked the feather out like nothing had happened,

regenerating the wound to his eye.

“I was wondering who they were... It’s those filthy traitors...! So you’re all going to defy Lady Lufas again?! Not just once but twice...?! I’ll kill you... I’ll kill you! Kill killkillkillkill!!!” Scorpius passed right by me in her mad charge at the heroes, as she raged and screamed bloody murder.

No, she wasn’t the only one. Aries and Aigokeros also charged at the revived heroes with enraged looks, and the trio of Twelve Stars members clashed with Phecda, Dubhe, and Mizar.

Oh no... Their formation crumbled!

“Calm down! You’re falling into their trap!”

“Hee hee... Looks like our roles have changed.” Pollux laughed scornfully when she saw my panic as Alioth jumped at me once again.

We dodged his slash, but next, one of the Dragon King’s heads came at us with its gaping maw, intent on swallowing us whole. We barely managed to get out of the way, but the Dragon King didn’t just have one head. The remaining nine heads all expelled their breaths, fully enveloping us.

Of course, We weren’t going to just take it lying down. We folded our wings so that they covered us before quickly spreading them back out. By doing so, We created intense wind pressure which erased the breath attacks, making room for us to instantly charge into the Dragon King. But just as We were about to hit the Dragon King, Alioth once again stepped in and blocked our blow.

Are We at a small disadvantage here? We had activated Alkaid, but it seemed that dealing with both the Dragon King and Alioth when they had the backing of the Goddess was a harsh prospect.

“Miss Lufas!”

“Whoops. I’m going to have to insist that you continue dealing with them.”

Libra and the others are...no good. They’ve got their hands full with the argonautai. In fact, against that many enemies, they might be the ones who actually need backup, which means there’s only one move left. We need to blitz Alioth and the Dragon King.

We flapped our wings hard, forcefully rotating to Alioth's side before using our nails to try to take his head, but at that moment, the image of the old Lufas speaking with Alioth about our dreams rose unbidden to the back of our mind. We paused, the memory fresh. Having let the perfect chance go, We were forced to back off and create space from Alioth.

Dammit... What the hell was that...? It felt like our body itself was hesitating to kill Alioth... Wait, could that actually be it? We're only able to tell because We've mixed so much already, but... Lufas is probably really sweet on the people she considers close to her. You could say she gets really attached, probably because of how little her father loved her from birth. So now, she gets really sweet on anybody she deems close to her, coddling them and usually forgiving them when they do anything mischievous. We thought that was just "my" personality at first, but it seems that Lufas was the same way. So no matter what, We'll end up hesitating for a moment when attacking him. But at this level, even an instant's hesitation could spell death. It'll create a huge opening.

In game terms, hesitating for a moment in a battle like this would basically be like handing an entire turn over to the enemy. *Isn't this really bad?*

"It's just like back then, isn't it? Even though you could win easily if you just fought with your full might, you don't seem to be able to. You could call it your one and only weakness."

We reacted to Pollux's words with a smile of slight self-mockery, saying, "Looks like it," after a moment's silence.

Well, who could have expected that We'd have a silly weakness like that? Not knowing ourselves turned out to be a huge handicap, didn't it? Thanks to that, our weakness has come to light in a dire situation like this. We didn't know... Apparently, We seem to be weak to those We feel close to.

It wouldn't have been a huge deal if the gap in power was big enough, but Alioth wasn't such a weakling as to allow that.

"Lufasssssss!"

Next, the Dragon King roared hatefully as he charged at us. *He still has that much hatred left for us, even though he doesn't have an ego? How annoying.* He's huge—170 meters—so any charge with that body will hurt, but not so

much that We can't do it.

We allowed ourselves to be carried backwards while suppressing the Dragon King's heads, grinding away at the ground as We ate the charge head-on.

"Grk... Oooaarrgghh!"

Then, with just the grip strength of a single hand, We grabbed one of the Dragon King's horns and used brute force to throw him up into the air. However, the Dragon King stopped himself midair and unleashed his breath attack with all ten heads in a counterattack. The breaths mixed together, turning into a single flash of light that rained down on us.

We can dodge—no, We can't. If that thing hits Mizgarz directly, it'll destroy the planet! Even if Mizgarz manages to survive, it'll still destroy all of the human territories!

"OOOOAARRGGHH!"

We clenched our fist and punched the breath attack straight on. We succeeded in bouncing the breath attack back, but the Dragon King dodged it, and the mass of energy that was all seven elements combined disappeared into the depths of the sky.

We'd somehow managed to reflect the attack, but its power was still incredible. Our hand was burned and bleeding. We could simply heal it though, and now wasn't the time to be bothered by pain. *Still, to think it would wound our fist, which was fine even after punching a meteorite to destruction... That may have put some small cracks in our confidence...*

"Aaggghh!"

But it seemed that We had no time to think on it. Next, Alioth closed the distance and swung his sword in an orthodox descending slash. We dodged, opening up an Exgate to summon our beloved whip sword from Maphaahl Tower. Using it, We defended against Alioth's attacks before putting in a counterattack ourselves.

In return for lowering the power a little, the multi-hit skill Quick Raid's windup was small and left little opening for a counter. If used well, it was a speed-focused skill that could land multiple hits, and We used that to send a storm of

slashes Alioth's way. However, oddly enough, Alioth had used the exact same skill. Our swords clashed countless times, and a field of gravity was generated between us from the power of our attacks as well the number.

In the end though, both power and speed were on our side. *We can push through like this. Yeah, it's definitely possible... So... Stop remembering the past! The smiles of the past will only serve to dull our blade... But they won't get out of our head!*

"Grk?!"

We ended up being the ones pushed back. Having been forced to retreat by Alioth's onslaught, We were blown away, sword and all. That was when the Dragon King gave chase, attempting to finish us off with a stomp. We managed to react in time, putting up our arms in a cross block to receive the sudden weight forced upon us, but the power involved with the attack was so massive that the ground caved in.

Our arms are... They're fine. They're not broken. But our current position was still dangerous. After all, our movements were completely sealed, and being unable to defend against Alioth's next attack was a very bad position to be in.

"OOOAAAAGGHHH!"

Alioth pulled in his sword and charged towards us. *It'll definitely hurt to take that...* Our only choice was to defend against it while being prepared to eat the damage from the Dragon King's stomp. We still had enough HP. It'd hurt, but it wouldn't be fatal. *Okay... Have to make sure the timing's perfect...*

The next instant, something sent the Dragon King flying and got in between us, blocking Alioth's sword with bare hands.

It took us a while just to let out a confused, "Wha?"

A flash of light described it perfectly. All We saw was a silver shine, and the next instant, she was in front of us. Her platinum hair swayed in the wind. Her robes were pitch black, her skin was white like fresh snow, and she was in no way tall. However, she had Alioth's sword scissored between her fingertips and wasn't giving an inch. At that moment, she looked gigantic.

"Just what are you doing, Maphaahl?" she said after a pause. "How could you

have so much trouble with these old ghosts after you won against me...?”

“You’re...”

When she turned back, her eyes were crimson red. Fangs peeked out of the edges of her mouth, and her expression betrayed absolute belief in her abilities. She kicked away Alioth as if he were just a stone on the side of a road, before turning back to us with an accusatory glare.

“I told you, you know. If you were to ever lose to someone else, I’d come back from the dead and punch you flying. The only one allowed to kill you is me—the Vampire Princess Benetnasch. Don’t forget that.”

The noble Vampire Princess who was strong enough to ward away even the Goddess’s temptation stood in front of us, absolutely unchanged from how We remembered her.

* * *

Aries was in the middle of a tough fight. His stats had never been that high in the first place. Even though he’d been boosted to level 1000, the same as his opponent, he was facing off against the Beast King Dubhe, who had once been hailed as one of the Seven Heroes as well as Lufas’s equal. The beast who had lost his reason showed the whites of his eyes and drooled as he brutally and ferociously attacked Aries.

“BEEAAARRRRRR!!!”

The combo completely relied on his brute power as a beast. However, the attacks themselves weren’t all brute power. He was still half-person, so he had the skill to accompany it, but that didn’t mean Aries was going to just retreat. He was very forgiving, but he would still never forgive the Seven Heroes. They had betrayed his master when she’d trusted them, after all. He would never forget that.

“Haaaggghhh!”

Aries and Dubhe’s limbs clashed at high speeds, each contact creating sparks. Punches, backfists, elbow strikes, knee strikes, roundhouses... A super-high-speed fight was unfolding between the two of them, and the damage was piling up. Aries used Mesarthim. Dubhe was definitely being damaged just by being

close, burns visible all over his body, but Dubhe continued to swipe with his claws as if he simply hadn't noticed, and Aries was gradually gaining more wounds.

“BEAARRGGGGHH!”

Aries crouched to try to dodge Dubhe's raging blows with his steel-like arms, smoothly transitioning into a sweeping kick. Once Dubhe's stance had crumbled, Aries kicked him upwards before chasing after him.

After Aries had gotten past Dubhe, he turned around. Using his leg like a whip, he let loose an ax kick wreathed in fire. However, Dubhe disappeared the instant he made contact before reappearing a moment later behind Aries, sending him flying.

“Gagh?!”

Aries crashed into the ground, burrowing a hole into the earth. He quickly regained his senses and resorted to digging through the ground as if he were swimming until he got behind Dubhe, who'd just landed. Just like that, Aries grabbed Dubhe's head from behind, slamming it into the ground before the Beast King could react.

However, Dubhe's sheer physical strength was to be feared, and he forced himself upright before falling backwards just like that on top of Aries. Having been crushed into the ground, blood leaked from Aries's mouth.

But it was Aries's turn next. He pinioned Dubhe's arms behind his back as he slammed countless kicks into the Beast King from his position.

It was Dubhe's turn now to have blood leak from his mouth, but the Beast King quickly retaliated, doing something similar to a shoulder throw and sending Aries flying.

Though the Sheep tried to get back up quickly, Dubhe was quicker, already stomping on Aries, which produced a dull sound. Dubhe repeated the stomp twice, three times, then four. Dubhe stomped with enough power to cave in the ground, and Aries's resistance soon weakened. Then, Dubhe made for a fifth stomp to finish Aries off.

Aries could do nothing but gaze blankly as Dubhe's leg descended on him, but

the next moment, Dubhe was wiped away from his line of sight. Rather, he was punched away.

There was a moment of silent confusion. “Huh?”

Before Aries stood a large man’s very muscular back. His hair was a dark red, like crimson, and he was fully covered in a black bodysuit. His arms were as big as logs with veins visible on the surface, and he made no effort to hide his rampant animal nature, which surpassed even Dubhe’s.

“Yo. You’re not putting up much of a fight here, are you, Aries.”

The name of the man who stood in front of Aries scornfully laughing was Leon the Lion of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars.

14

When Benetnasch opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was the familiar ceiling of her room, as she was in her coffin.

A coffin’s comfortableness shouldn’t be underestimated. It was lined with a down futon made by the country’s best alchemists and was Benetnasch’s favorite bed, since it was so nice. That wasn’t the problem though. The problem was that Benetnasch had woken up, just like normal.

Right. I should never have woken up again. I should never have been able to get up and stand again, because I fought Lufas with all my might, lost, and died...

“Oh, you’re awake, Princess!”

A vampire who had been serving her for over several hundred years reacted immediately when he saw Benetnasch wake up, raising a cheer. He had been turned into a vampire far back in the past, in the age of true-blooded ancestors, so he was a living witness of the ancient past who had sworn eternal servitude to the bloodline. His wrinkled face warped as he smiled in true heartfelt happiness at seeing his lord and master wake up.

Ten more vampires burst into the room after hearing the servant’s cry. They

were survivors of the battle two hundred years ago, and each one of them was capable of destroying entire countries on their own. Their group was called the “Ten Blooded,” and it was obvious that they had taken inspiration from Lufas’s Twelve Heavenly Stars.

Benetnasch saw their overjoyed faces, but all that was on her mind was confusion. After a moment of confused silence, she asked, “Why am I alive?”

The wound she’d sustained at the end of that fight had certainly been fatal. There was no doubt her heart had been destroyed. No matter how incredible Benetnasch’s regeneration ability was, she shouldn’t have been able to survive having her heart pierced through. She’d even felt the sensation of her life dripping out of her along with her blood. She’d started going numb, paralyzed from her fingertips onward, and she’d also felt exhausted, like she had fallen into a bottomless darkness.

She’d even thought that the next time she opened her eyes, if she ever did, she’d be in the afterlife, and if such a world existed, she’d then decided that the first thing she’d do was go punch Alioth and the others flying. *So why am I still alive?*

“It was an Amrita. They heal all wounds, and even resurrect the dead. They’re the ultimate medicine. Lady Lufas used it on you before you died, Princess.”

“What? But she never...” Benetnasch started, but then she thought back to the moment.

No, wait a second. Was there really no sign? Isn’t there something that seems likely if I think back?

Yeah, it happened after I asked Lufas to hold me... I felt some sort of liquid in my mouth. I thought it was my own blood, but...

She considered the matter silently. *I’ve been had. Lufas slipped me the Amrita when I wasn’t acting myself and wanted a hug. Argh, that’s so embarrassing! I looked like such a fool! And that also means that Lufas already knew I wouldn’t die back then but went along with what I said anyway.*

Benetnasch’s face went red in an instant, and she started shaking. Saying things like, “Hold me,” and, “Thanks,” because she had thought she was dying

had come back to bite her, becoming a source of intense embarrassment.

“...ut.”

“Princess?”

“ALL OF YOU GET OOOUUUTTT!”

She was taking out her embarrassment on other people magnificently. Her subordinates weren't to blame at all. There was no reason for them to be yelled at; Benetnasch just wanted to lash out.

She chased all her subordinates out and shut herself into her own coffin. Even then, her shame didn't disappear, and she continued to roll around inside, writhing in embarrassment. Her personal coffin was quite spacious.

She raised a scream that couldn't be transcribed into words as she cocooned herself with her own futon and rolled around.

Embarrassing! So embarrassing! I just know that Lufas, that woman, was laughing inside! No, she might have been laughing outside too. She's got a really bad personality in some ways.

And I was so uncool... So uncool! I said “Thanks”...!

I wanna go back to the past and punch myself! And Lufas too, about a hundred times while I'm at it! No, a hundred times isn't enough. I'm gonna mount her and punch her ten thousand times!

That day, a black mark was recorded on the Vampire Princess's history. This wound would leave its mark forever, feeding the fire of Benetnasch's motivation to take Lufas down.

It took Benetnasch an entire day until she finally recovered from the damage she'd taken and left her coffin.

* *

Benetnasch stood before Lufas with her arms crossed, giving Lufas a baleful look, angry that her longtime rival had been cornered by someone else. It had happened two hundred years ago too. Even though Lufas had promised Benetnasch a rematch, she'd been defeated, and now she was once again being cornered after having won. And by ghosts, no less.

Yeah, I know, Benetnasch thought. My anger is selfish. I'm the one who decided to expect something of her, and now I'm one-sidedly getting angry that she's not living up to it. I know it's childish. However, emotions were different from reason, and Benetnasch was the type to prioritize emotions over reason. That was why she was annoyed and angry. That was why she wanted to yell.

Benetnasch was about to open her mouth to say something, but was beaten to the punch by Lufas. "You saved us, Benet. Honestly, We were in a pinch."

Judging from her smiling face, she's not even a little surprised at my appearance here.

Such a thing was only natural. It was Lufas who gave Benetnasch the Amrita, so she probably expected that the Vampire Princess would show up again eventually. There was no way Lufas would ever have killed Benetnasch in the first place. After all, her existence had been one of the cornerstones of humanity's survival so far, and Lufas had no idea what removing that cornerstone would do.

With her opportunity to chew Lufas out squandered, Benetnasch set her complaints aside and settled for unhappily averting her face. "Don't misunderstand. I didn't come here to save you. I just didn't want anyone else to beat you."

Benetnasch looked away from Lufas and instead turned her gaze to Alioth and the others. What she felt was disappointment. And anger.

I could say the same thing about Maphaahl, but these guys are worse. What the hell are they doing here? You're doing this again, even though you all made the same mistake two hundred years ago and incessantly cried about it?! Seriously?

"But there's something I don't like even more..." Benetnasch paused. "And that's all of you ghosts. They say idiots only get better when they die, but it looks like even that didn't manage to fix any of you."



Benetnasch had never once regretted the path she'd taken. Sure, she regretted the embarrassment she suffered due to her words, but even then, she had never regretted the choices she'd made to get there, since that would have been a betrayal of herself. That was why she'd resolved to accept any and all consequences of her decisions and only move forward. Whether it was for good or bad, whatever she chose was her way of life.

That was why she couldn't stomach Alioth and the others, and the one controlling them was even worse. Seeing people do something they would only regret later irritated her, and anyone making them do those things was even worse.

"I came to punch Maphaahl, but... I've changed my mind. I can't stand to look at any of you. I'm going to send you all to Hel myself before you embarrass yourselves further."

"Benet."

"Step aside, Maphaahl. You're next."

Benetnasch's crimson eyes were dyed in anger. As for what she was angry about... Well, maybe it was the shameful appearances of Alioth and the others, or maybe she was angry at the Goddess for playing with the heroes who she'd respected and worked with, even after death. It could also have been both, or something else entirely. None of that mattered to Benetnasch. What was important was what she felt in the moment. Reasoning and logic would follow after.

I'm gonna destroy them. That is what my heart is telling me is just right now!

The urge might have come from just not liking Alioth and the others and wanting to hit them, or she might have simply wanted to release them. But that didn't matter to Benetnasch either. Either way, it didn't change what she was going to do.

Benetnasch kicked off the ground. That action alone changed the shape of the surface of the planet as the Vampire Princess changed into a silver comet, assaulting the past heroes.

By compressing her internal time to the limit, Benetnasch slowed down her

experience of her surroundings, and the world to her changed into one so instantaneous nothing but light could enter it. In terms of numbers, she was going over Mach 40,000—around half the speed of light. She was currently experiencing the world of sub-light speed. It was where Benetnasch *lived*, and now that her internal experience of time matched her speed, any second a normal person experienced allowed her to make a year's worth of movement.

However, her opponents were the Seven Heroes. Alioth was just barely able to enter this world, and he swung his sword.

“Wrong.”

They clashed. Benetnasch's claws lopped off one of Alioth's arms, and she continued on like that, charging at the Beast King next.

Dubhe, who'd been sent flying by Leon and was now on his knees, reacted to the killing intent let off by Benetnasch, turning towards her to intercept. Dubhe howled, swinging down his stout arms with all his bestial physical power. Benetnasch chose to meet that straight on, using both her arms to receive Dubhe's blow.

Both combatants' power caused the ground to cave in, and they stopped moving. They participated in a contest of strength for a while, after which Dubhe lost to Benetnasch in power and was lifted upwards.

“You're wrong too.”

Her claws flashed silver. A red flower bloomed, and Dubhe's arm flew through the air.

Mizar, who was battling Aigokeros, was next. He created several tough walls and put them in Benetnasch's way to try to defend himself, but Benetnasch simply broke through the steel walls and cut his leg. Phecda tried to use speed to confuse her, but the Vampire Princess easily caught up to him and split his guts open.

“You! And you too!”

The silver comet ran around everywhere. Her movements left even time far behind, and Alioth and his companions' attacks couldn't graze her. Well, even if they did, they probably wouldn't do much damage. If they wanted to defeat

her, they had to deal enough damage to outpace her aberrant regeneration ability.

A hundred slashes were unleashed by the Sword King in a fraction of a second. Fierce punches were thrown out by the Beast King at such a speed his fists seemed to split and double. The rain of blades created by the Blacksmith King threatened to blot out the sky. The storm of arrows shot by the Adventure King were faster than sound.

But all of that only ever managed to hit Benetnasch's afterimages. It was comical.

"Slow! Tepid! Dull! What the hell? You're all boring. Since when— Since when have you all been so cowardly!" the Vampire Princess roared.

Alioth and the others weren't weak. In fact, their stats were actually higher than when they had been alive, now that they had the backing of the Goddess. But they'd lost their spirit; they had no heart. They had no will to kill. As it was, they were simply dolls imitating their previous abilities and techniques. Such worthless toys would never be able to bring down the Vampire Princess.

Benetnasch purposefully caught Alioth's downward slash with her bare arm, and the blade bit into her bone. Seeing that, Benetnasch once again felt disappointed. She even felt grief and lamentation. Alioth had once lived so single-mindedly by his sword, Benetnasch had actually respected his skill with it, but now... *To think he wouldn't even be able to take an arm I've offered up to him... That's just too sad.*

"How pitiful, Alioth. Before, you would have taken my arm and then proceeded to carve me up from shoulder to stomach."

Dubhe swung at Benetnasch. Once again, she willingly stopped it with a bare arm. Her bones broke, and her arm bent at a wrong angle, but once again, all she felt was disappointment.

"And the Beast King, who could once split the earth, can only do this much? The Beast King I knew would have been able to at least pulp one arm," Benetnasch spat, truly exasperated, and counterattacked.

She used her half-severed arm on Alioth, and the broken one on Dubhe. They

were both sent flying with a punch. Alioth's sword and sternum were broken. Dubhe's arm was pulverized, and his skull caved in.

Seeing that, Phecda immediately nocked an arrow and let fly a stream of bolts, but Benetnasch neither defended nor dodged. She simply closed in on Phecda straight on. The arrows gouged into her eyeballs and sent fingers flying as they grazed them. But Benetnasch wasn't perturbed. She reached Phecda while regenerating her eyes and fingers as if her wounds didn't matter.

"What's wrong? Can you not even make a pincushion of me when I'm alone? Your former self, famed as one who could even pierce the impenetrable Dragon King, would cry."

Benetnasch struck Phecda with her knee. Just that broke Phecda's ribs and caused the bones to stab into internal organs.

While pulling out the arrow that had lodged itself in her eye, she looked over at Mizar, who stood with an army of countless golems. They all jumped at Benetnasch together and swung their weapons, but none of them did anything. Blades that hit her neck broke, swords that stabbed at her heart bent and snapped, and a single swipe of Benetnasch's arm sent them all flying away together.

"Simple toys. Even if you have the skills, you don't have the concentrated intent. Your novel ideas used to be your weapon too. You'll never be able to reach me if all you can do is repeat the past."

Benetnasch disappeared, instantly catching Mizar's head in her grip. Then she slammed him into the ground, the force of it cracking the earth. The tremors reached all the way to Svel, and it was said that the shaking bounced the Wise King Megrez from his chair and into the ceiling.

With Mizar still in her grasp, Benetnasch burrowed deep into the ground, reaching the mantle at the center of Mizgarz. The temperature was around 6,000 degrees Celsius, and there were over a million atmospheres of pressure weighing down on them. Benetnasch easily ran through that world of death and continued on to the other side of the planet. Even then, she didn't bleed off any momentum as she flew out of Mizgarz before kicking off a nearby asteroid and turning around. She reentered Mizgarz's atmosphere and once again slammed

Mizar into the ground, taking another trip through the center of the planet. Then, she burst out of the ground and used brute-force to fling Mizar, who was wreathed in fire, at Dubhe and Alioth, squashing all three of them at once.

“Right now, I can’t stand to look at any of you anymore than I already have... Disappear! Lunar magic: Catas—”

Just like that, Benet was about to cast magic to finish the four of them off while she was regenerating the burns all over her body, but Lufas stopped her. “Wait, Benet!”

Lufas paused, then explained. “They’re argonautai. They’ll come back indefinitely. You can’t kill them.”

“Mrgh. I see.”

Having received Lufas’s warning, Benetnasch changed the spell she was going to cast. Now it was the Moon elemental spell Luna Tentacle. She activated Aigokeros’s oft-used spell, generating a crowd of tentacles that captured the caster’s enemies, and the four heroes were bound hand and foot.

With that done, Benetnasch gave the four heroes a glance. For an instant, her eyes betrayed a hint of sadness, and Lufas caught that. Then, Benetnasch turned around as if she’d lost all interest.

15

“Leon...” Aries was still on the ground, looking up at his unexpected savior. “Why are you here?”

Leon and Aries’s relationship could in no way be described as friendly. In fact, they could be considered the people who got along the least. Aries didn’t actually dislike Leon that much, but Leon clearly looked down upon and was prejudiced against Aries, treating him with nothing but contempt. Leon had been calling Aries a trash monster for a long time now, and he did not seem like the type of person to jump in to help if Aries was ever about to be killed. In fact, he would definitely say, “What a fitting end to a trash monster.”

Leon was the type of man who only valued strength, and he based all his decisions and opinions of justice on power. That was why this was so seemingly impossible.

“I came because I smelled something really nostalgic, and here you all are, having the loudest party. A feast like this is wasted on a small fry like you... I’ll be having the rest.”

Leon’s mouth bent, and even his human face was filled with the ferociousness of a wild animal. He made a physical sound as his muscles swelled, and his arms, which were already the size of logs normally, got even thicker. His pectorals turned as hard as orichalcum, and his clearly defined abs were now better protection than any armor. Veins popped out all over his body, and the heat he let out into his surroundings made the air shimmer like a mirage.

“You can watch me from the ground there... I’ll show you how I fight.”

Leon clenched his fists and disappeared. He reappeared right afterwards, swinging his fist down on a heroic spirit that another one of the Twelve Stars was fighting, crushing the spirit into the ground, armor and all, and creating a depression in the ground as well. With just one hit, he turned a heroic warrior into a pile of wrongly bent limbs, dealing enough damage that the spirit didn’t even twitch. Then, Leon charged into a group of heroic spirits, sending scores of them flying with just a simple tackle.

Of course, the heroic spirits didn’t just take that lying down. They took up their swords and attacked Leon together. In the face of that, the Lion King put his hands in his pockets and took the attacks unguarded, his thoughts unreadable. The result: he was unscathed. The swords he’d been attacked with had been shattered into dust, and they hadn’t even scratched Leon.

Leon kicked, squashing the powerless heroes all together. With his hands still in his pockets, he slowly walked towards the next group of heroic spirits. This time, they answered with magic. High-level spells of all elements mobbed Leon, resulting in a fiery explosion.

If someone were watching Mizgarz from space at that moment, they would still have been able to see the shine of the magic and explosions from that distance. That was how far the effects spread. However, Leon simply continued

on through the storm of magic, reaching the heroic spirits as if nothing had happened.

“You scum... You’re not even worthy appetizers!!!”

Unfortunately, the heroic mage who had been standing in front had their head grabbed, and Leon swung the mage’s body around as a weapon.

Next followed a scene of sheer violence as a person was used to hit other people. Each blow broke another mage, and blood and meat scattered everywhere as the heroic spirits were massacred. The poor, pitiful mages lost all semblance of human form, becoming simple chunks of meat before they were finally released.

Well, the most unfortunate one may actually have been the young mage who was farthest back, because he had to experience this fear longer than anyone else. He was an unusual age for someone considered a hero, and he made an audible, “Eep!” as he scooted backwards.

Leon was merciless. The next instant, an arm thicker than the young man’s waist made direct contact with his head, and everything above his neck disappeared in a spray of blood. Blood splashed on Leon as he turned his bloodshot eyes on his next group of prey.

Seeing him like that, Lufas couldn’t help but think, *Who’s the real enemy now?*

“OOOOOOAAAAGGGHHH!!!”

Leon roared, and the countless heroic spirits in front of him were torn to pieces and sent flying, tossed around as if their strings had been cut.

The Lion King’s roar was not just for intimidation. It was just a scream, but even that was accompanied by destructive energies. It gouged out the earth and parted the sky as it rampaged through the enemy formation. The eardrums of the heroic spirits tore, and their bodies warped as they were crushed by an invisible, irresistible power.

“You’re all dead...!”

Leon once again disappeared. He was so fast that even other members of the

Twelve Heavenly Stars would probably have trouble finding him.

Sounds of blows landing and things cracking or being pulverized rang out many times as the air seemed to explode near groups of heroic spirits, sending several of them flying every time. Of course, this didn't just happen once or twice. The air exploded anywhere a member of the argonautai stood, and seasoned heroes were pulverized and scattered one after the other. They couldn't dodge in time, and any guard they put up was just destroyed along with their temporary bodies, all of which was being done with nothing but pure physical strength. With overwhelming strength, one didn't need special abilities. All that was accomplished with brute force alone; punches with no skills accompanying them and kicks with large swings that were a far cry from polished.

The spirits of the seasoned heroes were absolutely unable to put up a fight, and in the end, they were simply torn asunder. The powerful were strong because they were mighty. It was as if Leon was saying that as he fought, and the message was both clear and simple:

"I don't need any unnecessary add-ons or ornamentation."

To Leon, abilities and skills were unneeded, useless. They were nothing but a performance crafted by the weak to be an appeal to the world that they were strong and that they were putting in a touching amount of effort. *All I need is this body of mine. I have enough power in these fists to not need any of that.*

So Leon punched, and he continued to kill.

Like that, simple, normal attacks—all his actions—were like finishing moves! It was simple, incredibly pure violence. This was the reason why Leon was hailed as the strongest, even amongst the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars. If every attack he unleashed was fatal, then there was no need for attack skills. If swords broke on his muscles even without him doing anything, then there was no need for defensive skills.

The Lion King bared his fangs as he ran through the battlefield, building a mountain of corpses one body at a time. With that, there was nothing more the argonautai could do.

Well, there might possibly have been a viable course of action. Though they

proved far inferior when compared to Lufas or the Seven Heroes, they were still heroes from myth who had reached level 1000. The number of skills, magic, and heaven-arts they'd learned was vast, and depending on how they were used together, the heroic spirits could possibly have turned the tide. Depending on how their abilities were used, they could have suppressed Leon, similar to what the Twelve Stars had done in their fight with him.

However, that was only possible if they had leadership. As the disorderly mob they were, there was no way they could take the best course of action with people acting the lone wolf, dragging each other down, and hampering one another in general. With the heroic spirits unable to exercise even half their original power, they were simply killed one by one before Leon eventually reappeared and the earth was dyed red with their blood.

"No, this isn't enough... As I thought, I can't feel full without a main dish...!" Leon said as he looked up at the Dragon King belligerently.

Responding to that, all of the Dragon King's ten heads recognized Leon as their enemy and bared their fangs.

In the past, before Lufas had appeared, Mizgarz's power balance had been split between the four strongest monsters. And of those, the Dragon King Ladon and the Lion King Leon were now about to enter their first fight. The two of them were very similar; they were both despots, and they both plumbed the depths of atrocity. They controlled others through violence and fear.

Leon expanded his body, tearing the clothes he was wearing. He grew fur over his entire body, and as he discarded his human form, he eventually resembled a lion. Finally, he settled down as a giant lion monster the same size as the Dragon King.

With their true forms finally revealed, the two tyrants growled as they glared at each other. Pollux hurriedly jumped off the Dragon King, not willing to be caught up in their fight.

* *

On the other hand, the town of Laegjarn was in a complete panic. Of course they were. After all, a mythical battle had suddenly started just outside of town. It'd be weirder to stay calm. There was a gathering of heroes who only

appeared in fairy tales, like those you'd read in a book, and they were all being annihilated continuously. The sight was utterly unreal. Just that part was more than anyone's brain could process, but then a 160-meter-tall lion and 170-meter-tall, ten-headed dragon appeared.

Alfie was slumped on the ground in shock and despair, while Friedrich had realized that he couldn't run outside the barrier and so had started to dig into the ground. Kross had seemingly gone half insane as he started yelling, "The world is ending!"

Sargess seemed to have noticed something, as he simply said, mysteriously, "Whether we live or die here is equal... All is up to the will of great space. Ia ia."

Jean shouted, "I'll fight too!" as he tried his level best to get out of the barrier.

On the other hand, Gantz was calm. The owner of the inn had fainted, so he had brewed his own piss-poor coffee, and he scrunched his face at the horrible taste.

"U-Um... You're quite calm, aren't you?" Sei sat in a chair facing Gantz as he took the coffee the mercenary offered him. Virgo was next to Sei, and she'd frozen due to the bitterness of the coffee.

"There's no point in panicking, after all. Their battle isn't at a scope which we can understand. No matter how we cry or wail, the outcome won't change, so I might as well kill time with a cup of coffee."

"B-But, isn't there something else you could be doing...? Like calming everyone down?"

"That'd be impossible. The entire town is in chaos. They won't listen to what we have to say, and they're being loud enough that we'll be drowned out anyway. In fact, we'll become an outlet for their anger in the worst case. What you suggested is the job of nobility in the first place. That's not my area of expertise."

"But Lufas just got rid of the nobility..."

There was a moment of silence. "Yeah." Gantz looked out of the window.

Outside, the townspeople were, as always, running left and right like headless

chickens while shouting meaningless things. It really drove the point home that people were animals that lost all control once they fell into a panic. However, he didn't know how to feel, given that members of the hero's party like Kross were mixed in with the crowd as well.

On the other hand, Friedrich had hit a hot spring and was expelled from his hole due to the water pressure. *What the hell is that tiger doing?*

* *

“RWUOOOOOOOOAAAARRRR!!!”

“JAAAOOOOOOOOHHHHH!!!”

The two giant monsters cried out before clashing head-on.



In order to compare their abilities, their first moves would probably be the moves they had the most confidence in. Leon and Ladon's clash made the barrier around Laegjarn creak and groan as a sonic boom whipped through the area. Everything other than Laegjarn was turned into a wasteland in an instant, and the two monsters who had done this continued their contest of strength without paying any heed to the damage.

Retreating wasn't an option. It was a fight to determine who was more powerful. However, it was Ladon who had the upper hand. His ten heads moved together, biting into Leon's body.

Leon's tough hide and muscles were pierced through by even more fearsome fangs, and each head bit off a chunk of him, chewing the pieces they came away with. But Leon simply copied that, opening his mouth and chomping at Ladon's body. The Dragon King's scales, which were lauded as harder than anything in the world, crumpled under the force of Leon's jaws as the Lion King ripped off a piece of Ladon's body and swallowed it.

Seeing such a ghastly scene, Luna brought her hands to her mouth, trying to resist the urge to vomit. "Th-They're eating each other... And even though they're being eaten, they're both ignoring it and trying to eat the other... They aren't sane...!"

Both Leon's and Ladon's bodies were covered in blood, but their movements weren't dulled. Leon was the next one to make a move. He opened his mouth wide and blasted Ladon with a point-blank howl. The destructive howl with concentrated mana in it swallowed up the Dragon King and continued on its trail of devastation, evaporating the ground. The blast continued on out of humanity's sphere, eventually erasing a lone island that was in its path in a dome-shaped explosion.

But Ladon was still standing. The Dragon King opened all ten of its mouths, breathing fire at Leon in retaliation. Each bullet of fire from each mouth would be able to evaporate a city on its own, and the heads fired the attack continuously at fearsome speed. It was like a machine gun that shot missiles. Even while bathing in fire of its own making, the Dragon King continued to shoot, causing pillars of fire to erupt over and over.

Luna, shocked into silence, reacted by holding Terra close to her body, trying to become a shield to protect him from the aftershock that was surely about to hit them. She'd realized that she was less than a bug in the face of this banquet of monsters, but even then, she was still one of the Seven Luminaries. She could at least serve as a shield.

Her tragic but brave resolve ended with Luna holding Terra to herself, but no matter how much she waited, no such expected wave of heat came. She opened her eyes in confusion; what awaited her was the sight of Lufas's back as she stood in front of Luna with a single arm in front of her. Lufas had created a barrier, which opened a small amount of safe space behind her. The flames flowed behind Luna like a flood; it was as if she were looking at red rapids from inside a glass bottle.

"Don't carelessly stick out a hand or anything. You'll turn to ash just by touching that."

Apparently Lufas had saved them. At first, Luna was relieved by that realization, but that was quickly followed by confusion. She was grateful that they—or rather, Sir Terra—had been saved, but she had to wonder whether or not Lufas should have been worrying about her own subordinates. However, Luna quickly realized that such things were unnecessary.

In the midst of the hot winds, raging like a torrent, the Twelve Stars seemed utterly unaffected as they watched the fight between Leon and the Dragon King. No matter how powerful it was, aftershocks were still just aftershocks; to them, it wasn't anything to get worked up about. Actually, when Luna looked closer, she could see that only Libra, who was weak to fire, was being covered by Karkinos, who was acting like a shield.

M—Monsters... All of them, monsters...!

In the midst of this hell hot enough to even boil rock, they were, for some reason, completely fine. Benetnasch was sitting on a rock as well, and that rock was clearly superheated, which meant it was like she was sitting on magma. She didn't seem to mind at all though. In the first place, the Vampire Princess was a monster who'd just dug through the mantle of the planet. Something of this level probably only felt a little warm to her.

Faced with this battle that was in a wholly different dimension, Luna was made to realize just how reckless they had been, picking a fight they'd had no chance of winning.

16

"Thank you, Fairy Princess. With this divine sword you have given me, I will surely defeat the King of Devils and return peace to this world."

After a pause, she said, "Yes. If it's you, you'll 'surely' achieve that. Be careful on your journey."

This was a tale from several thousand years ago.

At the time, the Armies of Darkness had driven humanity to the brink of collapse, and a hero had risen up to defeat the King of Devils along with his friends whom he'd forged a strong, solid bond with. Pollux had given the hero legendary equipment, taught him the King of Devils's weak point, and sent him off. She'd done this while knowing that he would never come back, that this was a journey of death.

After seeing the hero's party off, Pollux covered her face.

At first, she was silent. "It's so stupid," she then said. "Why does no one question it...? Even though things go way too smoothly for them..."

A weak point on the King of Devils? Don't make me laugh. There's no such thing, because he's really a divine beast created by the Goddess to govern the world. He's an arbitrator. Just like my main body, he's an agent of divinity.

There's no way a human could win against that. The Goddess made humans so they wouldn't be able to win. Even if they fought seriously, the outcome was already decided. But they'll probably win. That's how the scenario is written, after all. The King of Devils will be defeated, and then in a couple thousand or tens of thousands of years—whenever the Goddess deems it necessary—the king will change his name and form and once again appear to drive humanity into the depths of fear. Humanity doesn't know. No one does.

All of the evil kings from the past who were spoken of in legends were actually the same person. He was even the God of Destruction all the way back when humans had just branched off from the heaven-winged, whom Aeneas—the first human—had traded his life to eliminate. He was also the Beast God, the enemy from when the beastfolk had just been born, and the world was steeped in a chaotic war. Not to mention the Divine Giant who had run on a rampage with his army.

And now he's named himself the Great Demon King. Next time he'll just have another name, humanity will be none the wiser, and I'll take part in this farce once again. I'll pretend I'm an ally of humanity, but I'll be the reaper, spreading the poison called hope and sending them off to their deaths. That's the true identity of the Fairy Princess. It seems like things are split into two sides, but they're actually the same.

So, yes... I can't help but be fed up.

For a moment, she was quiet, then said, “So stupid... Why do they...look at me with such straightforward eyes, like they truly trust me...? Come on, doubt me...! Figure out that it's weird! It's obvious if you just think about it a little! You only ever see weak monsters and other enemies so you can grow stronger bit by bit, and you're only given stuff to help you follow that curve...! And then there's me, some random fishy woman who claims to know the weak point of the big bad king...?! Now matter how you think about it, it's weird, right?!” She paused. “Please, just doubt me... Don't let me fool you...”

Up until now, Pollux had sent off heroes many times—over and over and over and over and over again. She had led them with a smile, gifted them weapons, given them advice, and tested them with trials to become stronger. Every time, she had been reminded that their hearts, which wished for peace in the world, were undoubtedly straight and true; they were worthy of being called heroes.

There had once been a young man who claimed to love the world—he had never been able to see the peaceful world he loved so much. There had once been a swordsman who said that he could become as strong as necessary to protect his loved ones—when the world had regained its peace, he was dead along with the people whom he'd loved. There had been a very nice man who'd once said that he wanted to show children a peaceful world as he laughed

heartily—he had never even been able to see those children’s faces. There had once been a kind swordswoman who went on a journey to her death, despite her gender, in order to ensure the futures of the people precious to her—she hadn’t even left any bones behind.

All of them had been sent to their deaths by Pollux.

The world regained peace as the scenario dictated, and the heroes who had died so magnificently were given a fitting send-off.

There was a long silence. “I can’t...take it anymore...”

Pollux’s beautiful face scrunched up, and she covered her face with her hands as she crumpled to her knees.

Their trusting gazes hurt. Their words of thanks hurt. The way they look as they talk of a peaceful future... It’s so bright...and so sad...

How many heroes with bright futures ahead of them have I watched die? They, of all people, should have been the ones to enjoy the world at peace, so why do they all have to die? Their lives are short anyway. Even the longer-lived races only live several thousand years... Why can’t they be allowed to spend their remaining years happily as a reward for a hard fight?

Pollux had always wondered this, but the Goddess didn’t like leaving people who were too powerful unchecked. That was why *he* would always deal the heroes a fatal blow and purposefully lose.

I’m sure the one I just sent off today won’t be coming back either. He’ll never reunite with his lover, who he said was waiting for him.

I always pray that they never come, but the Goddess, who I have to pray to, doesn’t want it to be that way. So they will always come, as their fates dictate. Should I just not help them? No, they wouldn’t have come here in the first place if their resolve was so half-hearted as to let my refusal end their journey. If I did that, they would just die fruitlessly after challenging him, and someone else close to them would inherit the curse that is the hero’s title. Should I just tell them the truth? No. Doing so will just shorten their lives. The Goddess will never allow anyone who knows the truth to live.

“How long is this going to go on...? How many times do I have to trick them...?”

How many more times will I have to kill these children...? Answer me... Goddess..."

I can't take it anymore.

Pollux's spirit was at the breaking point. Her work was something she didn't want to do; it was like stomping on a flower that was heroically trying to bloom in the middle of a wasteland. Pollux had done this continuously, repeating it many tens of thousands or millions of times, even while loving every life that was born and admiring their brightness, even while desperately trying to survive.

While watching people as many generations rolled on, Pollux eventually began to love humanity almost like they were her own children. She wanted to protect them. She wanted to hold them. She wanted to save them from this hel. However, reality forced her to do the exact opposite. She was nothing more than the grim reaper who drove them further into hel. She was the scum who had to stomp out the flower.

After a silence, she said, "I should never have gained a sense of self."

How much easier would it have been to just stay as an avatar? To simply be a normal spirit that's just controlled by the main body, able to get by without feeling anything painful...

Pollux drew the knife she had for self-protection and put it to her throat.

Yeah... I can just disappear. I shouldn't exist.

However, her hand was stopped by her brother, her other half.

"Pollux, stop!"

Pollux silently tried to shake off her brother's hand, but that was impossible given their differences in strength. "Let go of me, big brother."

"No. I won't."

Castor held Pollux firmly. Pollux lacked enough vigor that he was convinced that if he didn't, she would disappear. As Castor slowly soothed his little sister, he couldn't help but curse the Goddess.

Oh Goddess. Oh omniscient, omnipotent Goddess Alovenus. Why do you treat

us this way? Pollux is not the kind of girl who would be able to withstand this role. She's far too kind to continue doing this.

We should have been switched. I want to switch with her, but that can't be. The heroes always come looking for the Fairy Princess. I'm sure the Goddess has done something to feed them information. And if they look for my little sister, she'll answer, because she knows that if she doesn't, things will only get worse.

In the end, I'm just the chaff, a by-product of birthing the sublime being that is the Fairy Princess. I'm just a failure of a fairy who can do nothing but fight. I'm nothing but a defective product pushed out first in order to give birth to something superior.

But Pollux can no longer handle this. She's at her limit. As things stand, she'll break. Even if I spend long years slowly healing the wounds in her heart, they'll only be reopened along with new, fresh ones.

Like that, the cycle of healing and reopening wounds, then healing and reopening wounds again eventually resulted in wounds so deep they could never be fully healed. Her guilt would never disappear. It just kept piling up at the bottom of her heart. It would all have been fine if she was irresponsible enough to just forget about it or if she was rational enough to be able to chase it all the way to the edges of her memory. But Pollux couldn't do that, and she broke little by little.

That was why Castor prayed. He prayed for someone...anyone. He prayed for the appearance of someone who could truly destroy this hel, who could tear apart even the Goddess's script. He prayed, even while harboring resignation and certainty that no such person existed.

* *

He shouldn't have prayed.

Several thousand years later, Castor deeply, deeply regretted his prayer. The one who stepped foot into their paradise that day was someone who would paint over their hel with an even worse one. Her ominous black wings asserted her presence, and her beautiful looks filled with absolute confidence went along with a bestial smile. Behind her was an army of monsters.

Pollux, who had confirmed the woman's level with a special skill granted to the Fairy Princess, almost swooned. Her level was 4200.

Huh?! ...What is this...monster? No. There's no way she's a hero. As if there could be a hero like this.

But still, she's not "her." She's not someone prepared by the Goddess. Why would she create someone so meaninglessly strong like this, when she's been killing heroes all this time because she didn't want to leave behind anyone too powerful?

In the first place, this woman's ignoring the level limit the Goddess put in place. Pollux quietly contemplated this information. I heard the rumors that there was someone called the Black-Winged Conqueror who "he"—Orm, who's calling himself the Devil King now—is truly afraid of and is avoiding direct confrontation with.

Pollux had thought it was an exaggeration though, since there had been many people up until now who'd had rumors this exaggerated floating around about them. Unfortunately, however, it turned out that the rumors were all true.

What should I do...? This person... She'll ignore the scenario and really kill Orm. Not because of the Goddess's scenario. It won't be some fake victory decided on beforehand. She'll really and truly dominate Orm in a real fight and kill him. She's a real monster.

She was a true bug, naturally born into the world and completely unrelated to the Goddess's machinations.

In front of her, Pollux raised her trembling voice to ask, "U-Ummm... Do you have business with me?"

"Indeed We do. We've heard that there is a Fairy Princess in these parts who makes use of a strange ability... Welcoming a follower of the Goddess would be interesting, so We came. Okay now, getting to the point... We came to take you away, or tame you, Fairy Princess Pollux. And you too, big brother Castor."

Pollux was rendered speechless. It took a couple of seconds for her to process what she'd just heard. *Huh? What? She's going to capture me? Like a monster?*

Many humans had visited Alfheim throughout the years. The Fairy Princess

had been petitioned for help or advice many times. However, no fool had ever come to try to capture her. As if there could be. The Goddess wouldn't allow it.

“Ah. Of course, you're welcome to resist. You have the right to refuse. If you don't want to be captured, resist with all your might.”

“I'll take you up on that offer!”

Castor raised his anchor, and *The Argo* floated up into the air along with all the heroic spirits who were on it. The little sister summoned them, and the older brother led them. With that arrangement, the skill Argonautai was completed and became an unbeatable, unfair skill.

However, the black-winged woman took one look at the ship and sent out a light punch. Right afterward, a giant hole opened up in *The Argo*, and it started to sink while emitting smoke.

Huh? Shocked, even Pollux's thoughts were momentarily quiet. Wha— Uh?? Did The Argo just...fall? Is this a joke?! Did this person seriously sink The Argo with just the wind pressure from her punch?! That thing is as hard as orichalcum?!

The black-winged woman was truly a common sense-destroying being, or common sense possibly just got sick of dealing with her and ran away at full speed. The summoned heroes were all easily subdued by her Pressure and rendered immobile. The fairy siblings also crumpled to their butts on the ground.

What the hell? What the hell is she?! I don't know anyone like her?!

Pollux felt like she was experiencing a somehow even worse version of Hel, a super-Hel. This woman was like an all-encompassing despair that engulfed and surpassed regular despair. She was a source of unfairness, absurdity, and irrationality that stomped on everything lesser than herself, one who broke every other absurdity. And she was exactly what Pollux had been waiting for—one who could rip apart even a Goddess's script.

The woman stood in front of Pollux and looked down upon the Fairy Princess. “Your eyes, they look like they belong to a corpse. Looks like the role the Goddess forced on you was too much of a burden.”

Surprised, Pollux could say nothing in reply.

“What’s wrong? Why are you so surprised? Did you seriously think that We didn’t know? True, We do realize that We aren’t on the smart side of the scale, but...even then, even We’d notice something this obvious. You and the Devil King... It’s such a perfect story of opposing light and dark that it’s like someone is literally pointing out that there is a purposeful balance being kept. And that’s not all. Megrez translated a stone tablet left hidden deep in some ruins, and it seems as if you’ve faced off against someone very similar to the Devil King many times, and for a long while now. It’s as if the world is a pendulum, swinging between light and dark, between hope and despair... That convinced us. ‘Ahh, they’re totally working together,’ We thought.” Lufas paused. “Right on the money, yes?”

Lufas used a finger to lift up Pollux’s chin so they would lock gazes.

“It must have been quite painful for you. You must have deceived heroes and watched them die countless times, and it must have eroded away at your heart. Rejoice—this will be the last time.”

Pollux was shocked.

“If the Goddess will not answer you, then We shall. The curtain will soon close on this play, and when it does, you will no longer have to send anyone to their deaths.” Lufas quieted, then said, “We will be destroying the whole stage, after all.”

While listening to Lufas, Pollux felt like she was face to face with a demon. *Demon...an evil being that defies divinity. That’s exactly what she is. No matter how I look at it, she’s completely ignoring the Goddess’s script. For someone like this to be born... It must have been completely unexpected for the Goddess.*

But... Ahhh, how ironic. To think that the one to say the words I’ve always wanted to hear wasn’t one of the heroes I’ve always loved and respected, but the exact opposite. Or maybe she said it because she’s a demon?

“I’m going to retake true freedom for this world, which has been forced to repeat a third-rate play over and over again. In order to do that, We want you... Become our servant, Fairy Princess Pollux.”

It was the temptation of evil, and it led down the treacherous path of betraying the Goddess.

The hero wouldn't be able to destroy the Goddess's script. The only one who could would be a monster completely out of the norm. So Pollux took Lufas's hand, because even if this was the path that led to her destruction, she could no longer stand plucking flowers before their time.

17

The Argonautai were pretty much taken care of. Aigokeros had them bound and captured once they'd been beaten down, just short of dying. Alioth, Dubhe, Phecda, and Mizar had been rendered similarly powerless, and Leon was currently fighting the Dragon King, Pollux's last ray of light. In other words, the other side had pretty much exhausted all their cards.

We stepped outside the barrier We'd put up in order to protect Luna and Terra before coming to a stop in front of Pollux. There was an elven heroic spirit in front of her, but he was no match for us. Not to mention, We had no intention of defeating him. If he were to die, the barrier protecting Pollux would disappear, and she would burn to a crisp.

At any rate, the fight was over. She no longer had any chance of winning.

"Looks like it's over. Or do you still have moves left? If you do, you should pull them out now... We'll crush them head-on."

It seemed that our body would stop listening to us when the Seven Heroes were involved, but there had been no hiccups other than that. *Whether it's a Dragon King or heroes from the past, bring it on.* I cracked my knuckles and waited for Pollux's next move.

"Heh. Then why don't I heed that request. Descend, progenitor of the heaven-winged, you who rule over all the stars in the sky! Uranus!"

Light filtered down from the heavens, illuminating a place on the ground like a spotlight. Flowers budded there, and a man with pure-white wings and clad in a

white robe descended, accompanied by divine light. He had three pairs of wings, and there seemed to be a halo of light attached to his back. A group of young male and female heaven-winged came with him, all of whom were orbiting him while chanting a sacred hymn, like they were celebrating his descent.

The man named Uranus smiled affectionately, and he slowly, gently, got closer to the earth. Yes, slowly... Almost infuriatingly so...

“HURRY IT UP!”

We flew up above him and punched him into the ground. The ground shook, and he had his arms and legs bent in unnatural directions and was foaming at the mouth from his impact with the ground.

“HeBGH?!”

Oh, what? He’s totally weak. Pollux said he’s the progenitor of the heaven-winged, so We thought he’d be really strong, but he’s no big deal at all. It seemed he’d lost his life with a single strike from us, and he anticlimactically disappeared into bright particles. The young heaven-winged around him seemed to have been totally taken aback and creeped out by what We’d done. They were on the floor, trembling and unable to get up.

By the way, the reason they weren’t burnt and dead right now was because the heroic spirit was still maintaining his barrier to protect Pollux... But the flowers that had just budded had been roasted away in an instant by the waves of fire coming from the Dragon King.

“H-Huh? Then how about this?! I manifest the first human. Come, father of all humanity and guardian of the sanctuary—Aeneas!”

Responding to Pollux’s summons, particles of light took human form. Then, a half-naked man with a tight and muscular body appeared. He was good-looking enough to be called a handsome young man, but even then, We couldn’t allow him to wear just a single loincloth.

Well, I get it. After all, he’s the first human... Which unfortunately means he’s basically a caveman. “The father of humanity” sounds cool, but honestly, that just means he was alive in a time without any sort of culture or civilization to

speaking of, so of course he'd be like this. It's true he's an important figure of history, but...

"Put on some clothes!"

"BuHOAGHH?!"

He took our punch and spun around in the air as he was sent flying before disappearing off into the horizon. *These opponents are really lackluster...* We thought, but something in our own memories provided the answer as to why.

Apparently being the guardian of the Goddess's Sanctuary was the sort of thing with a single successor, and it seemed that the next generation also got the previous generation's level and skills. *I guess that's the sort of thing a Goddess who doesn't want to uselessly propagate the amount of level 1000s would do.*

As soon as We remembered that, We understood. That was exactly why the guardians across the ages were all strong, even though they were human. It seemed that Aeneas had passed his abilities on just before he'd died, so his strength when resurrected was like an empty shell, devoid of all his power. Even though the Argonautai usually got resurrected in their prime, that didn't seem to be possible if the subject's abilities were given to someone else.

Well, even without his original power, given that he was still a guardian of the Goddess's Sanctuary, his current strength would still have allowed him to fight evenly with the current Megrez... *But that still doesn't make him a match against us.*

We beckoned to Pollux, who was dumbfounded at what had just happened, provoking her.

"Next."

The silence stretched. "F-Fine! Then I'll bring out the big guns! Someone who was once summoned from a different world and who returned peace to the world with a great power given to him by God. Come, otherworld hero!"

Thunder clapped, and a single man wreathed in sparks descended in front of us. His trained body was like steel. His muscles were a glistening black, as was his bald head. His manly face was almost bestial, and even his eyebrows were

shaved. He was wearing boxer shorts and boxing gloves. There was no way he was Japanese. This over-190-centimeter-tall boxer shouted, “I am the champion!” as he started shadow boxing.

Alovenus... You...

“Um... Far back in the past, I used to prioritize strength, and I ended up summoning him...”

We paused before saying, “Well, if you only chose based on strength, then of course something like this would come up...”

Yeah. Compared to him, the kid Sei is way more of an orthodox hero. This just drives the point home. Actually, now that We’re on the subject, We haven’t understood a thing this guy’s said since he’s appeared. We don’t understand English.

Why is this guy’s English untouched when Japanese seems to get automatically translated into Mizgarz Common? Didn’t Exgate Online accommodate all sorts of regions and languages?

“I digress, but thanks to him trying to spread his language, parts of Mizgarz’s language have become untranslatable. Though there do seem to be people that like to use the words he’s spread, like your crab...”

“IT’S HIS FAULT?!”

“Nice punch!”

Karkinos’s faux-English is his fault?! The instant We had that thought, our fist made contact with the boxer hero, sending him flying into the horizon.

Jeez... This is supposed to be a serious fight, you know. Don’t bring in weird people!

“That couldn’t have been your trump card, could it?”

“Grk... I-It doesn’t matter who anymore. Come! Summon Heroic Spirit!”

Apparently she was backed into a corner pretty far. In a fit of desperation, Pollux activated the Argonautai. However, though the ability to summon them was infinite, their souls weren’t. It was impossible to summon those who had already been summoned and were now captured, which meant that she truly

only had a few cards left to her and probably didn't pose much of a threat anymore.

Or so We thought, but then our expectations were defied, at least in a sense.

"I have been summoned!"

The one who appeared was someone who We'd sent flying before. It was Mars, and he spent some time just loitering there. He gave me a pompous look and smiled a smile that said he was confident in his victory, though We had no idea where that confidence came from. Then, he drew his sword and started running circles around us.

"Now is the time to show you the true power of my revived self! Sorry for cutting corners last time. I misjudged you. But now I will have no mercy! I, one of the Seven Luminaries, Mars of Fire, will burn you with my full might! It will only be but a moment—In other words, in the instant it takes for time to circle, my revived self will display my true 'Motion of the Soul'! Fire and diamond dust. The moment when these two opposing powers mix, it creates a new evolving sanctuary from this chaos. With these mixing powers, a miracle of both an instant and an eternity is about to be brought forth. It will be a hastening towards the future, and I will become a god who surpasses time! Dance, fire, to the song of despair! Sing, ice, a song of blessing! You are already my prisoner. There is no room to escape. Your path to the unknown future has been closed. Be afraid, cower, and sing my blessings! This is my instantaneous light. You will probably see it the moment you die. It will be a kind embrace, inviting you to nothingness. Scatter! Ultimate Technique: Great Crimson—"

"Shut up."

As always, this idiot would not stop talking, so I punched him, banishing him to the ends of the sky.



Unlike when We had first fought him, We were now much more used to our body, so even with the same stats, our abilities were like night and day. Not to mention that Alkaid was also activated, so our stats were better too.

It was evening now, and after confirming a new crater on the moon, which had just started to show its face, We turned back to look at Pollux.

“It seems you’re all out of options.”

“U-Uhhh... The Dra— The Dragon King is still...”

Pollux looked towards the Dragon King as her last hope, but that was when a blow from Benet slammed it into the ground, and it showed the whites of its eyes. Apparently Benet had grown tired of watching from the sidelines and had finished off the Dragon King.

Leon, who’d had his prey stolen, shouted at her, but Benet—not one to be beaten—returned fire with, “It’s because you kept dragging your feet.”

Well, their tiff doesn’t matter right now.

“So, what about the Dragon King?”

“Grrrrr...”

“Okay, then. It’s about time. Leave Pollux’s body.”

Pollux grinned widely. Then, she spread her arms, as if inviting us to attack her. “No. You’re the one who’s got no moves left. Can you really attack this body? If you want to defeat me, then fine. Try it. But with your strength, this girl will definitely die if you attack me.”

The move left us in stunned silence.

Tch...! It was infuriating, but the Goddess was right. As long as she wouldn’t leave Pollux’s body, there was nothing We could do. There was the option to attack with Blunted-Sword Strike, but that probably wouldn’t get her to leave. We’d just be hurting Pollux for no reason. If this possession was treated as some sort of status effect, then We could cure it, but her stats showed nothing of the sort.

We could just cut the mana with Lifthrasir—no, it’s not guaranteed that the

Goddess became mana to possess her. There are Sun element spells that only affect ghost-types—that probably won't work either. There's a warrior skill that damages SP instead of HP—no, that's dumb. Her SP is infinite, so that won't do anything.

What to do... There has to be some way...

As We stood there, unable to do anything, Castor spoke. "Pollux, don't lose."

He had, at some point, come to stand next to us. He wasn't speaking to the Goddess. Those words were most likely pointed towards Pollux, who was sleeping.

Persuasion, huh...? We can't imagine there's much point, but maybe Castor will have some effect, since he's her twin. Let's leave this up to him, though that's kind of pathetic.

"We've always been waiting for this moment, haven't we? Don't you remember the never-ending script, the endless loop of deaths? You hated that. You cried all the time. Now is the moment to go beyond the script. It's time for us to leave the Goddess's third-rate playbook. We need to grab freedom with our own hands... Isn't that right, Pollux?!"

"Third-rate..."

Pollux looked visibly saddened by Castor's passionate attempt at persuasion. *Looks like that hurt Alovenus a little, huh? Oh, yeah. Wasn't she called third-rate by Benetnasch recently too?*

A small bit of something that seemed like the Goddess's power left Pollux's body, and the light of reason returned to her eyes.

Does this mean Pollux is resisting? It's not the Goddess just leaving on her own because she got sad, right?

At any rate, this is our chance. As long as we do something about that we can save Pollux. But... What is that? A skill? Magic? Heaven-arts? No, it seems like power itself, a true piece of the Goddess. We don't have a skill or whatnot that can do anything about that then. Maybe Vindematrix will... No, it won't work. It'll probably be useless.

Something... Anything...

“Call for me.”

A voice suddenly rang through the back of our mind, surprising us. The voice We heard said something that had been said to us once before, and it was something that We would never forget. It had probably happened before We had become me. It was a voice We’d heard all the time back in our days as an adventurer, so it had imprinted itself firmly into our memory.

“Call for me, my friend. When you do, I will always be your sword, no matter where or when.”

Ah, that’s it. It was you. Forgive us. We still aren’t fully awake, but We’re happy that you still recognize us as us in this situation. So show us, enchant us. Show off your power to the fullest.

“Divine and demonic. With these two powers combined, open, door of time and space. Oh you, with the ability to destroy convenience and opportunism. Exgate! Come, Taurus... No—Astelios!”

We called Taurus by his true name as we clashed divine and magic power together, boring open a hole in the world. Taurus was a name We’d given him when We had formed the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars. It was more like a title; it was not his true name. Because Aries never had a name of his own, the name Aries had simply become his own. However, Taurus was different, and there was only one person in this world who knew his true name—us.

Responding to our summons was someone who oozed reliability, and who hadn’t changed at all in two hundred years. The one holding the seat of the Ox constellation, a giant man with his coat waving in the breeze, manifested himself. Energy arced off the ax he held in his hands, and behind the mask, his eyes were settled on his target.

“Aldebaran!”

Taurus unleashed his ability to forcefully cancel the target’s ability or power. Whether that was heaven-arts, magic, a skill, or anything else, it didn’t matter. The blow, which could even shred a divine script, burst against the Goddess’s will, which had slightly separated from Pollux. A crack formed across space-

time, and the connection between the Goddess and Pollux was forcibly severed. Then, an explosive sound like a hammer or something else pulverizing a boulder resounded, and whatever Taurus had punched dispersed.

Well, that just now must have only been a small piece of the Goddess... It probably wouldn't even constitute a single hair... But still, that's an awesome hack. Having subordinates who seem to be hacking the world this hard gives us less ground to stand on. My word, how reliable.

Taurus was quiet, then said, "You seem more like yourself than before, Lufas."

"We're not completely back though."

We formed a small smile hearing our friend speak. We couldn't see his face through the mask, but We knew he was laughing nihilistically behind it. We always thought that it would be better if he showed his face, since he'd finally gained human form and all, but this seemed to be a thing of Asterios's. Just like his true name, he didn't seem to want to show his face to anyone but us. He was so delicate even though his body was so huge. We never really felt comfortable describing it as "maiden-like," but... *Well, We suppose that's what makes for fun personalities.*

Astelios was once again swallowed up by the Exgate as We saw him off to where he should be. After that, We...

No, not We...

We shook our head, clearing our muddled thoughts.

Oh crap. I was totally Lufas for a while... Wait. Was I just possessed? It's approaching how I was back when I fought Benet.

Oh no. The border between Lufas and me is getting less distinct. I can feel it.

I held up an unconscious Pollux as I watched Alioth and the others, who were being forced to return to being dead since the Goddess's power had been severed.

I'd like to see you all as your real selves next time, I thought...

A day had passed since my fight with the Goddess, who had been controlling Pollux, had ended. We'd rented the largest room at the inn and pretty much everyone had gathered. The Twelve Stars and I, of course, as well as the kid Sei, Terra, Luna, and even Benetnasch were there. But by definition, those words, "pretty much everyone" meant that at least someone was missing.

First, there was Leon. He had left right after the fight was over, claiming that he had no intention of playing friends with us, but that was just like him. The other one who wasn't present was Dina, who had yet to reappear ever since she'd run to the ladies' room just before Pollux attacked. At first, I only kind of thought that she was taking a long time on the john, but she hadn't come back even after the battle was over. Of course, she wasn't in the bathroom either; she'd completely disappeared. So right now, it was everyone but Leon and Dina.

Also, it turned out that after releasing Alkaid, I returned to being "myself" much more than during the activation. That made me pretty happy. As I thought, using it would awaken the original Lufas, so even though I could become strong, for me personally, it was kind of like blowing myself up.

I'd like to say it was only for serious situations, but it seemed unavoidable for the fight with the Devil King.

"Well then, can it be said that the two of you no longer intend to fight humanity?"

"Yes, that's correct. Now that we know of the devilfolk's true nature, we have no intention of throwing ourselves into an endeavor we know we'll lose," answered Terra, the Devil King's son.

This bastard hottie still infuriates me, dammit. His looks just scream, "I am the protagonist!" It's enough to completely overshadow that kid Sei and make people forget that he exists.

Even Sei himself muttered, "Couldn't this guy just be the hero?" He looked kind of crushed by his own sense of inferiority.

If I were to try to explain our battle as a fantasy game to a person who was

completely unfamiliar, then there was no doubt who they'd assume the hero was. That was just how much Terra looked like an orthodox hero. *Go explode.*

"You say that, but aren't you really just afraid of Miss Lufas?" Aigokeros tried to get a rise out of Terra.

Oh yeah. Didn't Terra pull one over on him last time in Blutgang? Still, that was a little immature.

"Maybe. It's pathetic, but there's no way for me to win." Terra easily admitted it though, showing no sign of taking the bait.

Oh, what an adult! Both a handsome guy and a cool adult. What the hell? You know, you're making us look like the evil ones. You could totally try showing some more flaws, okay?

I paused. *Ah. Oh, right, we are the bad guys.*

"Lord Lufas!" Kross exclaimed. "Are you seriously not going to slay these devilfolk, even though they're right in front of you?!"

"Before We may have done so, no questions asked, but now, We are not so heartless as to attack those who are raising the white flag of surrender. If you must kill them, do so yourselves."

"Huh?" He hesitated. "No, that's... Um..." The elf guy had seemed about to shout, but then he simply let his line slide.

Still, I wasn't about to stop anyone else from trying to kill the devilfolk. Their standing right now was basically as devilfolk who'd surrendered. Not only that, but one of them was the prince, so he wouldn't be forgiven so easily. Therefore, I would neither act nor stop people from acting. If they wanted to settle things, then they should do it amongst themselves.

But ever since I replied, the elf guy stopped saying anything. Well, he probably just expected me to be completely dedicated to eradicating the devilfolk like I had been two hundred years ago. Rather, from my separate viewpoint, the me in the past had been way too merciless. Though you could also say I just hadn't had any leeway.

I'd had the power to destroy the world and had been merciless as well as

coldhearted and relentless... *I'll say this bluntly.* It was only natural that I had been betrayed, that they'd given up on me. The problem was, I was definitely approaching that point again.

"Libra, have you seen Dina?"

"No. I have been searching since last night and have found nothing. She is likely no longer in this city."

I paused. "We see."

Even with Libra's searching abilities, Dina couldn't be found. She could go anywhere using Exgate, so it was easy for her to get outside of Libra's detection range. With things as they were, the question of why Dina had run would come up, of course, and I figured Pollux knew the answer. My theory was that Pollux knew something about Dina that would've made her life difficult. That was why Dina had run. At least, that was the explanation that I thought fit.

"Then, let's see... First, let's talk about Dina. Luckily, there are people here who know her as Venus."

"Dina...?" Pollux tilted her head at Dina's mention. Apparently she'd never heard of her.

When I'd spoken, Libra had taken out a piece of paper and started drawing on it at high speeds. When she was finished, Dina was rendered so perfectly on the paper that I could have mistaken it for a black-and-white photo.

You could do that?!

Pollux took the paper and stared at it seriously. Then, she started to drip sweat silently.

"Miss Lufas... This person... Was she with you recently?"

"Indeed she was. She claims to be an advisor who was with us two hundred years ago, but honestly, that's already been found out as a lie."

"Wha— Wh-Wh-Wha...What were you thinking?! She's the Goddess's avatar, you know?! This is just the Goddess Alovenus herself, only the clothes are different!"



Wh-Whaaaaat?!

“In fact, she’s the one who sealed you, Miss Lufas! I saw her two hundred years ago helping Alioth and the others with the subspace seal!”

Wh-Whaaaaat?!

Seriously, I didn’t expect this. Honestly, I’d sort of predicted that Dina was the Goddess’s avatar, but I never even suspected that she was the one responsible for my being sealed.

Ah, I see. No wonder Dina ran. That bitch. She knew this would happen once she noticed Pollux coming, so she just scarpered!

No matter how thin her presence was, this couldn’t be described as anything but an oversight.

“Wait, why did you even let someone like her be your advisor?! If you knew she was lying, then you should have dismissed her!”

“Well, We were just letting her swim around a little...”

“Are you an idiot?! Are you?! Letting someone swim around is something you do when they don’t know that you know they’re lying to you, so there’s no point if they know you know! You too, Libra! Why did you allow something this stupid to happen?!”

“My regret is deeper than the tallest mountain,” said Libra.

“You aren’t reflecting on this at all then, are you?! You’re going up instead of down!!!”

“Yes, I will be breaching the stratosphere soon.”

“You piece of junk!”

Pollux was seriously angry, her look menacing, and I started to experience a feeling I couldn’t describe.

Oohh... She’s really got her stuff together. Not like the Twelve Stars up until now, who you’d have to jokingly put a “lol” after that description for. She’s really got a normal, commonsense way of thinking.

This! It’s this! This is what was missing from the Twelve Stars! Listen to those

deft jabs! She's exactly who I've been waiting for.

There was a pause, then Pollux spoke. "Miss Lufas, could I trouble you to recount everything you've done from your revival up until now for me when you have the time? Since it's you, I'm sure you've missed something."

Pollux retrieved a piece of paper and started taking notes. I tried peeking at the paper using my peripheral vision, and it seemed she was making a summary of all the information we knew from what she'd heard in this conversation. *Wow, she's really diligent, isn't she?*

"My word... Miss Lufas being a muscle-brained fool isn't new, but it makes my head hurt. All of you should properly advise her, too, instead of just being her yes-men. Why do you think the Twelve Stars exist?"

"To serve her with all our body and soul and carry out everything she wishes for, of course," said Aigokeros. "Anything our lord says is the world's truth. If Miss Lufas were to say that right was left, right and left would change. If she said white was black, white would be dyed black. For that purpose—"

"Shut up, goat. The purpose of the Twelve Stars is to make up for what Miss Lufas lacks. Miss Lufas possesses absolute power, but she isn't perfect at everything. In order to do what she can't, she gathered together those with unique traits to form the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars to serve as her hands and feet. Someone has to be by her side as a brain, especially since Miss Lufas has always been a muscle-brain who likes to rush into action without really thinking. To think that of all things, someone would sneak in as that role..." Pollux said, sounding irritated as she looked at the other Twelve Stars reproachfully.

However, what she said was an important discovery to me, and I was somewhat surprised. *I see... So I'm not the only idiot here. "Lufas" was too.*

Exposed to Pollux's glare, the other Twelve Stars all replied without remorse.

"I mean, I'm not that smart either..." said Aries.

"Me too," said Aigokeros.

"Do you really think I could object to whatever my Lady Lufas wants to do?" asked Scorpius.

“M E is also not that great at thinking...” said Karkinos.

“Oh man,” Castor said, “I’m not exactly in charge of the thinking department either...”

“I’m also not great at that sort of thing,” Sagittarius added.

Pollux clutched at her head and groaned. “Muscle-brains, all of them...”

When she did so, it was Virgo’s turn to contract apologetically.

Seeing that, Pollux said, “Oh, it’s not your fault.”

So she’s the hardworking and wise type, isn’t she? She has it hard...

Then, Pollux glared at Libra, but the golem simply turned her head 180 degrees, refusing to meet Pollux’s gaze.

“Libra, when I’m not around, you’re about the only one who would work as an advisor, right? Why did you let Miss Lufas run around as she pleased?”

“An error has occurred in my hearing systems. I could not catch what you said.”

“What a convenient system that is. You junk-maid.” Pollux sighed exasperatedly. Next, she turned and glared at me. “Miss Lufas.”

“Y-Yes?”

“Now that I’m back, I will be overseeing what you do. Whenever you want to plan something, come to me first. Understood?”

“Huh? No, but...”

“Understood?”

I hesitated before saying, “Yes.”

In terms of simple strength, Pollux couldn’t even touch my feet, but for some reason, I couldn’t seem to go against her. I’d wager that I was yelled at by her a lot two hundred years ago for a variety of things, and since then, she’d held the reins in this relationship.

Ah, so this is what a true advisor looks like, huh? Now that I had something to compare it to, I could tell just how much Dina had slacked off in her job as an

advisor.

“Still, this is something we need to reflect on...” said Scorpius. “To think that it was the very fool who sealed Lady Lufas away. And I even played cards with her without noticing... Hmm... HmMMM...!”

“And I gave her a lecture on how to prepare tea without even noticing either...!” said Aigokeros.

Scorpius and Aigokeros shook their fists, making their anger known, but the words they’d spoken were just silly.

“Just how carefree are you guys...?”

The other Twelve Stars all acted similarly, making complicated expressions. Aries and Virgo seemed to be more sad that they were tricked than angry, and Libra looked like the other shoe had finally dropped, like something she had anticipated had finally happened. *Oh yeah, wasn’t Libra the one who doubted Dina the most?*

“Which means if we capture and interrogate her, we’ll be able to get closer to the Goddess by leaps and bounds.” Castor paused. “We didn’t know each other for long, but she didn’t seem like a bad lass though.”

“Be careful, big brother. She’s a monster. She can change what mask she wears however many times she wants.” In opposition to Castor, Pollux spoke of the reality of this world.

Yeah, she’s right. Women are seriously scary. Well, Scorpius and the others are technically monsters though.

“Hmph. Since it’s you, I bet you thought something like, ‘Having a subordinate whose thoughts I can’t decipher would be interesting.’ And you decided to leave her alone, even though you’d somewhat caught on, right? You’ve always been soft on those close to you, Maphaahl.”

Benet stabbed me right in the heart, and I couldn’t help but be taken aback.

“Grk!”

Yeah, you’re totally right, goddammit.

“Having an advisor whose intentions I can’t read would be interesting. And in

a certain sense, having a dangerous subordinate is a trope.”

That was the line I had once spat out after fighting Dina. Even for me, that was full-on stupid. However, I somehow couldn’t bring myself to think of her as an enemy in the end.

“At any rate, there are four main things to do from now on. First, we need to find Aquarius and Pisces of the Twelve Stars. Then, we need to follow Dina, who’s disappeared. After that, I suppose we should look for a way to change the devilfolk into fairies...”

“Looks like we need to split into four.”

“Indeed.”

Normally, splitting one’s forces was a bad idea. However... Well, in this case, there probably wouldn’t be any problems doing so at all. Honestly, keeping all the people here gathered together was kind of a waste of strength. There was the Black-Winged Conqueror (me), the Vampire Princess (Benet), and even the prince of the devilfolk and his aide. Not to mention most of the Twelve Stars as well as the rest of the hero’s party as an extra bonus.

Now that I think about it, this is a super chaotic mix-up of a party we got here... If we went all-out, we’d conquer the world in a day. By the way, if we were destroying the world instead of taking it over, it’d be over in an instant instead. It was seriously scary.

“I’ll be joining the team searching for the reincarnation method, of course. If I’m not there, they’ll probably get nowhere, after all.” Pollux paused. “Also, there’s something I’m concerned about.”

“Luna and I will join you,” Terra said.

“If Pollux is doing that,” Castor said, “then I guess I will too.”

“Then I’ll join you guys too...” said Virgo. “It’s not like I’ll be worth too much in a fight...”

The first ones to decide their activity were the fairy siblings, Terra and Luna of the devilfolk faction, and Virgo. Well, given their objective, this was probably the obvious choice. And I’d feel much safer with Virgo there with the fairy

siblings, rather than out in some dangerous place, so that was fine too.

“Aquarius should be in Muspelheim, the Burning Lands, right? Then those with resistance to fire would probably be best.” I paused, considering who was left. “Okay, then Aries and Scorpius should go. And in case there’s a fight, Karkinos should go too since he pairs well with Aquarius.”

Muspelheim was otherwise known as the Burning Lands, so it was probably quite the hot place. None of us were so weak as to go down to a bit of fire, but we were still susceptible to heatstroke if we were in the heat for too long. Therefore Aries and Scorpius, who held a high resistance to flames, would be best.

As for Karkinos, well, he was basically there to deal with Aquarius. With two Fire-attributed members, they were not well equipped to deal with her.

“Whaaaaaaat?! You can’t do that to me! I want to be with you, my Lady Lufas!”

“Get wrecked, Scorpion.”

“LIIIIIBRAAAAAA!!!”

As expected, Scorpius took the bait, but I decided to ignore them for the moment. I’d become much more used to handling them recently.

The next group would be the ones to search for Pisces, whose location was unknown. *Those two with their ability to search should go there.*

“Hunting for Pisces will be done by Libra and Sagittarius, with Aigokeros for support. We don’t think there’ll be a fight, but be careful anyway.”

“I understand my mission, master. I will definitely bring back Eros.”

At least call him Pisces. Well, whatever. They’ll do fine. Libra and Sagittarius will definitely get it done.

“The hero’s party can do whatever they like. It’s not like any of you are our subordinates, after all. Just do whatever you all think is best.”

“O-Okay!”

I made sure not to order around the kid and his friends, since I felt that would

lead to a better outcome. There wasn't a neat word to describe it, but they tended to take unexpected actions. The biggest example would probably be when they had made peace with me. I'd bet no one else would have come up with that idea. I wanted to pin my hopes on his trickiness as an otherworlder, which would lead him to ideas not bound by this place's common sense.

And last was searching for Dina... I was planning to handle this alone. I'd be fine on a battle-power front, and I wanted to take some time and talk to her too. At least, that's what I thought...

"Hey, Maphaahl. Aren't you forgetting me?"

I paused. "You intend to stay with us?"

"I'd just be bored in Mjolnir, after all. It'd be more fun to watch you."

Apparently Benet wanted to stay.

Huh? Is this really okay? She's not gonna suddenly attack me or anything, right? I don't exactly hate Benet... In fact, I respect her a lot, but it's scary that I have no idea when she'll decide to attack me.

At any rate, the teams were now decided. All that was left was to figure out how to get to where we were going. I could modify Suzuki, and along with Tanaka, that took care of two teams for now. I still wanted at least one more to cover the hero's party though, since at least Benet and I could just fly. Well, it was more leaping than actual flying for Benet.

"Next is our means of transport to our destinations, isn't it?"

"You can leave that one to me, Miss Lufas."

"Hmm?"

I was considering making another golem, but Castor cut me off, voice full of confidence. Apparently he had some sort of flying ride. Castor and Pollux met gazes and gave each other small nods.

"Let's go, Pollux!"

"Yes, brother."

"Combined skill: 'Heroic Spirit's Flagship!'"

Castor and Pollux joined hands, raising them up to the sky. When they did, light shone from their hands, piercing through the ceiling and flying up into the sky. It didn't seem to have any physical force, and though I described it as piercing, the ceiling hadn't been broken. Then, after some time, the light gathered in the sky, manifesting as a giant flying ship.

The people in town looked up, wondering what was going on, and found themselves gazing in wonder at the absurdity that was a giant flying ship.

This is... Wow. In RPG terms, a flying ship that appears in the endgame to help you move around the world map is a common thing, but I never thought I'd see the real thing...

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The heroic spirits' flagship was named *The Argo*. It was a large flying boat that measured 350 meters long and 52 meters wide. Manifesting it was only possible when both Castor and Pollux were together, and it used mana as propellant. *The Argo* had been built using one of the branches of the fairy siblings' true body. This was why it had very strong self-repairing capabilities; even if it was sunk, it would be back to normal in a few days. It was a rather unfair thing.

The heroic spirits summoned by Pollux manned the ship, so we didn't really have to do anything. The navigator was Pyxis, the Compass Box. The one-eyed man wearing a bandana knew all there was to know of Mizgarz's skies, and he boasted as much.

Suhail the Sail, a female pirate wearing a white coat, introduced herself as the chief engineer. Her looks weren't bad, but she had thick arms and legs that had been trained to their limits as well as clearly defined abs, so she just didn't exude any feminine charm.

Then there was a group of three dwarves named Naos, Tuleis, and Asmidiscs, who I couldn't tell apart. It seemed that they were the engineers on the ship. *This is exactly why I keep wanting them to at least change the color of*

their hair.

The helmsman was named Avior the Keel, and he was clearly not human. In fact, he was an undead monster called a dragon skeleton. *Was there not a better helmsman available?*

Other than them, there was a wide variety of argonautai taking on various tasks and supporting our current journey. There were about two heroic spirits in black robes who, for some reason, hurriedly got out of our way. But, well, they had been summoned by Pollux. She wouldn't have come up with anyone weird.

The Argo's maximum speed seemed to be Mach 5. I was told that, given six and a half hours, they could make a lap around Mizgarz. No matter how I considered it, that speed in no way matched the ship's looks, but this was a fantasy setting.

Also, the sailors were staring at Aries, and I couldn't help but wonder why. Not that it mattered.

"Oh, about that. In the past, we sailed around the world in this ship looking for a rainbow sheep, though we never found one in the end," Castor explained.

He was the captain of *The Argo*, and his captain outfit, which had been nothing but cosplay up until now, suddenly made a lot of sense. *So that outfit wasn't just for show.*

"This is the first We've heard of it."

"It was several thousand years ago, after all."

Several thousand, huh? Makes sense that there'd be no point in talking about it then. Aries probably wasn't the rainbow sheep around back then, and I wasn't born at that time either. Well, whatever. Not like it matters anyway.

"If any of them so much as look at Aries funny, We will throw them off the ship ourselves. Got it?"

"Understood."

I spoke fairly jokingly, and Castor simply responded with a strained laugh. At the same time, the sailors who were staring at Aries hurriedly returned to their

work.

Okay then, I guess it's time for a journey through the sky. I paused. I feel bad for the residents of Laegjarn. They're probably the most surprised about The Argo.

First, we went to Alfheim to drop off Pollux, Castor, Terra, and Luna, as well as the hero's party. I also lent them Suzuki once more as a mode of travel for them in the future. Then, *The Argo* headed towards unknown lands—in other words, those outside the human sphere of influence.

Aquarius was confirmed to be in Muspelheim, so we headed there first to drop off Aries and the others. I lent them Tanaka so they could return, and I also dropped off some heroic spirits to go with them and manage the seal in Aquarius's place. Hydras the Water Serpent and Fenix the Phoenix had been chosen in his stead.

Hydras was a type of dragon called a water dragon. Now, in his human form, he was a handsome man with long blue hair reaching his waist, and his level was 800. Fenix was a phoenix, said to be the strongest of the bird-type monsters. They boasted high heat resistance and regeneration abilities as well as the ability to do battle in the air. In his human form, he had red hair in a ponytail, was similarly level 800, and...handsome... They were both monsters that I'd captured, but I'd actually never raised them at all since I'd done so since they were all strong from the start.

"Oh, Miss Lufas! I am most moved to be seeing you again in the living world! There was worth in waiting for you even after death."

"I give my thanks for the miracle of this meeting."

The two of them took my hands while giving off this weird, sparkly hot-guy SFX. They were so thin too. Did these guys come out of the wrong world or something? Either way, they were bastards who seemed like they belonged in some shojo manga rather than this place. They were way too sparkly, after all.

Hey, wait a second. They're dead?! I don't remember bringing them to the final battle in the game though.

"A phoenix died?"

“Urk...! Please don’t poke at my weakness like that. It’s said that phoenixes are immortal, but it’s not like we don’t die. If you deal enough damage to outrace our regeneration, then of course we’d...”

The fact that a phoenix had died and joined the argonautai was, in some ways, amazing. However, the most inexplicable one in the end was the dragon skeleton, as expected. Dragon skeletons should have been dead already, but the fact that it was here meant that it had died anyway and become a member of the argonautai. *I mean, if he’s going to be revived anyway, might as well revive him as he was in life, right? Why is he still a skeleton?*

“We will be leaving humanity’s sphere soon, Miss Lufas. We expect there to be attacks from the devilfolk, so please be prepared.”

Having received Libra’s warning, I looked out of the ship. When I did, I could, in fact, confirm that things that looked like devilfolk were mobbing towards this ship. Since we were so stocked on fighting power at the moment, Libra or the other sailors would take care of the attacks, even if I didn’t do anything myself, but... Well, since I had the chance *I might as well tell them of Lufas Maphaahl’s revival as well.*

“No problem. We will go.”

I cut off Libra and jumped from the ship. My field of view widened all at once and was filled with crowds upon crowds of devilfolk.

Wow, amazing. They’re blotting out the sky. In total, there are... I can’t count that high. They’re probably over ten thousand though. Anyway, by most counts, I’m completely outnumbered. Most counts, anyway.

“He he he! Look, there are some idiots who left the human territories!”

“Whoo-hoo. Look at that. It’s a woman!”

“Now that’s a good woman. I wanna do her.”

As soon as they noticed me the devilfolk started to heckle me, but I simply watched while pointing a finger at them. A small ball of light the size of a marble manifested at the tip of my finger, and its faint light lit up my face.

“Oh? Looks like she wants a go.”

“What a brave lady. I bet she doesn’t know what level we are. Being so ignorant is scary, isn’t it?”

“Okay, let’s give her some despair before the fight... Some insurmountable despair, that is. Listen and be amazed. My level is 250! The Seven Luminaries, who you all barely manage to fight off so desperately, are not so far removed from me! Being around their strength is nothing much here on the dark continent.”

“Are you so scared you can’t even speak? Of course you are. After all, there are so many of us here on the same level as the ones who’ve given you so much trouble. You’re trembling so hard you can’t even form words, aren’t you?”

Ahhh... Yeah... Thanks for setting up that event flag so nicely. These people are pretty common in RPGs, aren’t they? They’re the kind of enemies that would be at the same level as leaders from the early-to mid-game, or they would be trash mobs in the final dungeon or something even though they’re supposed to be really strong. I also wondered why they weren’t actually in the leadership when I played these games.

I glanced over at the ship and noticed that Benet seemed to have completely lost interest, as she was yawning as if she did not care what happened. But that was only natural. Even though these devilfolk were level 250 and would certainly be considered strong, they were almost nothing compared to Benet and me.

“All right! Let’s start off by scaring her with some magic!”

“He he he. Maybe she’ll wet herself.”

“Don’t kill her. I want to enjoy her later.”

The devilfolk in the front had their own little conversation before they fired magic at me. While watching the spell come closer, the ends of my mouth bent into a smile.

Well, that’s about right...for a level 250. I could just take it, but if I do, I’ll get dust on my clothes.

I poured mana into the ball of light at my fingertip and instantly expanded it. The immediately enlarged light ball completely swallowed the magic spell that

came flying into it, and it didn't stop there. As the completely dumbfounded devilfolk were watching, it eventually expanded to a diameter of fifty meters, finally settling as a miniature sun. I actually could make it bigger, but if I went too far, I could then turn Mizgarz into a barren, scorched wasteland.

Well, this should be enough.

"Huh...? Wha...?"

The devilfolk, who had previously been howling and braying, all suddenly froze as their eyes narrowed into dots. A yellow stain spread from their crotches, and they started trembling furiously.

Sorry. You just picked the wrong opponent to start a fight with. I can't blame you for not recognizing me while I'm hiding my wings and wearing glasses, but you should be more careful whom you choose as an opponent next time.

I moved my finger, lightly flicking the completed Solar Flare in the direction of the devilfolk. Dodging was impossible. The miniature sun had its own powerful gravity, and it sucked the enemies into it. One after the other, the devilfolk were swallowed by it while crying and screaming. These death throes were filled with so much despair it hurt the ears, becoming a chorus that assaulted my eardrums.

Shortly afterward, the Solar Flare exploded. A cheerful firework was raised to celebrate our first steps outside humanity's sphere of influence, raising a mushroom cloud. I'd tried to limit the area of effect, but even then it turned out huge and showy.

Well, if you've all learned from this, then stop picking fights on a whim.

Thanks to the effects of Blunted-Sword Strike, the devilfolk were all left at 1 HP as they rolled around on the ground in tears, grateful that they were alive. I could have just killed them... Given what had happened with Terra, however, I figured I could let them go at least once. If his dreamy fairy tale of reincarnating the devilfolk as fairies was to come true, then there might not be any real need to fight the devilfolk.

However, that couldn't happen if I'd already exterminated them all by then. So once—just once—I decided to let them go. *Looks like I'm still at least a little*

bit soft...

When I returned, Hydras and Fenix unreservedly showered me with praise, but those words seemed to be hiding poisoned barbs towards each other's attributes.

"As expected, Miss Lufas! What a wonderful blow, just like the sun!" praised Fenix. "As I thought, the light of flames that burn away all in existence reigns supreme! Water is nothing in the face of that. Nothing!"

"How wonderful, Miss Lufas!" said Hydras. "A truly superb showing of *Sun-attribute* magic! It sounds like some piece of grilled chicken is under some sort of misconception, but your magic can't even be compared to that of the Fire element! In the end, fire is just an inferior version of the sun!"

It seemed that each of them noticed. The two of them shed their sparkly SFX, and their eyes instantly turned bloodshot as they glared at each other like a couple of street punks.

"Ah?!"

"Huh?!"

"You got a problem, dickweed? It sounds like you're getting too big for your britches, you dumbass wet snake! Wanna get evaporated?"

"Huh?! A cooked piece'a chicken like you shouldn't be making so much noise. You'll get noticed and eaten."

"Ah?!"

"What'd you say?!"

They grabbed each other's collars, and the way they glared at each other just screamed "small-time punk."



They look handsome, but I guess they're still monsters in the end. Their true natures are still pretty violent.

I ignored the two of them, who started trading punches without any sort of starting sign, as I laid my hands on the railing of the ship.

I'd heard about "humanity's sphere" and the "devilfolk's sphere," so I'd been pretty wary. I had thought that it would be dangerous without preparing enough power first, but it seemed like I was being too cautious. There was a possibility that the devilfolk we'd encountered had just been vanguards and that there were still stronger enemies waiting for us, but the enemies we'd encountered were still far less threatening than I'd expected. Well, even if some stronger enemies did appear, it probably wouldn't be any problem for us to deal with right now. *Maybe I'll leave the next ones up to the argonautai.*

"Sir Aries! Your attribute is Fire too, isn't it?! Let's beat this guy up together!"

Hydras had mounted Fenix, who had called for Aries's help after suffering a nosebleed.

"Wha—?! You bastard, that's playing dirty! Don't involve other people in this fight! Your weak-ass fire won't do anything, but his will even at half power! It's percentile damage, you know!"

Well, I guess that would happen in a battle of fire versus water.

Aries, who had suddenly been called upon, was flustered and panicking, but Scorpius tapped him lightly on the head.

"You can just ignore them, Aries. You shouldn't be paying idiots like them any mind."

"Indeed," said Sagittarius. "Fights like that need to be settled one on one."

"Sagittarius, put on some pants already..."

What he said was wise, but nobody was impressed, since he had said it with his crotch arrow flapping in the breeze. *Didn't I make you a pair of pants...? Why are you still naked down there?* Luckily, the mosaic that Dina had put on him was still there, but it was still hard to look at.

Benet cracked her knuckles as she gave Sagittarius a look like she was seeing

something filthy, like garbage.

Two hundred years ago, Sagittarius had almost never shown himself, even before his comrades, and I'd even heard that when he had, he'd been disguised. I'd assumed it was because he was specialized for assassination, but the real reason may have unexpectedly been because his nudist tendencies were hard for people to put up with, so Lufas had ordered him not to or something.

"Hey, Maphaahl. Can I kill that thing?"

"We will allow you to half kill him."

"Okay."

"Miss Lufas?!"

Sagittarius looked at me imploringly, but I didn't care. Benet kicked him flying out of the ship, so Libra fired off her rocket arms to go and retrieve him. While watching this, I couldn't stop myself from giving an exasperated laugh.

Ha, they're so noisy. But it looks like this trip won't be boring, at least.

The Prince Learns of the World

Given the Trade City of Ydalir's location, people from many different countries visited it. Not all of them were human, and seeing dwarves or beastfolk among those in the streets wasn't rare. Today, another young visitor from a foreign country was having his meal in the eatery attached to the inn he was staying at while seemingly depressed.

He had short green hair, and while his face looked somewhat aged, he was clearly young upon closer inspection. The clothes he wore were of good quality, which you didn't see too often around this area, and from the pure-white wings sprouting from his back, it was clear to see that he was a heaven-winged.

The inn he was at was considered the best inn in Ydalir, and its interior was nice and clean. The young man's name was Merak... He was the prince of the heaven-winged kingdom of Vanaheim, and it had been decided that he would be succeeding his father next year. In other words, he was a born member of the elite.

However, becoming the king of the heaven-winged was not as simple as taking the reins. To become the king of the heaven-winged, who were said to be the descendants of angels who had come down from heaven, an appropriately strong backbone and ability was required. So, as a trial to become worthy of being king, he had been tasked to travel for a year. During that year, he had to force over ten monsters or a monster over level 60 to obey him. If he didn't, he would be considered to not have the abilities of a king.

For this journey, he had been given the treasured sword of the royal family. This sword, the "Treasure of the Heaven-Winged," allowed the user to capture monsters even without the Monster Tamer class, and was currently hanging from his waist.

Merak was eating gracefully, befitting royalty. However, if one looked closer, his expression seemed lifeless. Merak was rife with worry. He still didn't know what kind of monster he should capture. There was no real rule of the trial

demanding that he capture a monster of a specific strength, which meant that he was free to capture anything. Even any old rabbit or mouse would do. Even if the monster was weak enough that they could be defeated by normal villagers to show off their strength, a monster was still a monster.

However, Merak's assignment was a rather peculiar one. If one were to simply take the trial's rules at face value, then he could simply just find ten monsters to capture, and it didn't matter what they were. It was not a hard condition by any means; it could be finished in a single day.

However, this was a trial to measure his ability as a king. Even if the rules allowed him to do so, he'd become the laughingstock of his people if he were to come back with weak monsters in tow.

Merak could just see them saying things like "So that new king doesn't even have the guts to take on a challenge?" or "What a pathetic king, to only be able to bring back such weak monsters."

The freedom inherent in this trial was actually a heavy pair of shackles with only the name of freedom. It was a test of how harsh a condition he could impose on himself, and how much he could accomplish. That was what the people were looking for. There had been records of kings in the past bringing back weak monsters that weren't even level 5, but those kings had been treated as scathingly and harshly as possible in those records. They were noted as having been almost nothing but decoration, with no real power to influence decisions.

Why...? Why was I born to the royal family...? If I'd been born into a more normal family, I wouldn't have to face worries like this... To Merak, his fate as a prince that he had been saddled with by birth and his eventual destiny to become king were nothing but heavy burdens. But even if he thought of it as a heavy burden, he wouldn't know what to do with freedom even if he were to be given it. He could only think, *If things were going to happen like this, then it would have been better if I'd been born as a normal child.*

The treasured sword at his waist felt unbearably heavy. The people in Merak's surroundings looked at him inquisitively, but the prince couldn't help but perceive them as stares of scorn and disdain. To him, it was like they were

telling him that he wasn't worthy of the sword he wore at his waist. *Look. Even that guy over there in the corner seat with the weird hairstyle that looks like he has a three-leafed clover on his head is laughing at me.*

"Welcome."

"Hey, do you have space for six?"

"Six? Then, please, this way."

Apparently some new customers had arrived. Merak shot a furtive glance towards the newcomers and saw a group of people in armor of all kinds. *There's no consistency in the way they dress, so they can't be soldiers. Maybe adventurers...? But their equipment's of oddly high quality for that...*

From what Merak knew of adventurers, they were dropouts who couldn't be employed in any other jobs, so they simply filtered down to being an adventurer. It was a job for the dregs of society. In other words, it was for hoodlums and thugs to make money. That was what Merak thought adventurers were.

However, this group did not look anything like that. *So what is up with this eclectic group?* There was a human swordsman, an elf who seemed like a mage, a dwarf in a full set of armor, and even a polar bear beastfolk and a halfling.

"Hey, Dubhe, get inside already. I can't get past you."

"I-I'm beary stuck..."

"That's because you tried to just walk in with that huge body of yours."

Apparently there was another person still behind the bear, who was stuck in the entrance. *From the voice, the person's female... Female adventurers are rare.* That being said, they were beings from a different world to Merak.

Once Merak was done eating, he picked up his plates and ascended the stairs while giving the adventurers stuck at the entrance a sidelong glance. Then, he entered the room he was renting before rinsing out his mouth and taking off his top. Merak placed the sword on a table and threw himself onto the bed.

* * *

Merak opened his eyes, and his vision filled with the sight of a ceiling as he

realized that he'd fallen asleep at some point.

I didn't think I was that tired, but I guess it's just in humanity's nature to get sleepy when you lie down. The chirping of the birds letting you know it's morning is nice. For today, let's go explore the nearby forest and see if there are any decent monsters to capture.

With that thought, Merak got up. That was when he noticed something which made him tilt his head.

"Hmm?"

Wait a second. Am I still drowsy from sleep? Or maybe I'm just remembering things wrong? His thoughts stalled. *There's nothing on the desk.*

No, wait a second. There is something. I see the belt holder to hang the sword off of, but there's no sword or scabbard.

Merak took a long moment of contemplation.

Maybe I just put it in the wardrobe. Merak opened the wardrobe to check, and of course, the sword wasn't there. *Of course it's not here. I don't even remember touching the wardrobe.*

Actually, wait a second. Maybe it just fell off the desk. After that idea, Merak searched the floor, but he didn't find anything there either.

Huh? Did I forget the sword on the first floor or something...? No, there's no way. I definitely came into the room with the sword at my waist. I remember that.

He paused. "C-Calm down, me. Just calm down and remember."

There's no way I could have lost the sword. That's not allowed. I'm sure it's somewhere. Yeah, I'm sure that once I find it, it'll have been somewhere obvious.

Yesterday... What happened yesterday? Did I fall asleep still wearing the sword? No, there's nothing there, and the holder is still on the desk. Right, maybe I simply held the sword as I slept? Merak checked the bed as well, but of course there was nothing there.

Merak started to panic, unable to say anything for a long while before he

finally stuttered, “C... C-C-C-Calm down... B-B-B-Be cool...”

Merak’s legs shook like a leaf in the wind even though it wasn’t cold. As if the floor had simply disappeared and he’d started to fall through a void, something cold traveled up from his legs directly into his brain.

Calm down calm down calm down...

I’m sure it’s here. I can’t have lost it. I mean, it’s a relic passed down through generations of heaven-winged royalty. It’s not something I can just lose! If I lost the sword during my trial, never mind becoming a laughingstock... I’ll...

It was a big enough failure that Merak knew it wouldn’t be weird to have his entire family stripped of their royal status.

“I-It’s gotta be here... It’s gotta be somewhere.”

After that, Merak spent an entire hour searching his room—from the obvious places like around the table or inside the wardrobe to places that would be impossible for a sword to be, like moving the wardrobe and checking behind the piece of furniture itself. Merak fruitlessly searched the same places over and over again, though, of course, there was no way doing the same things over and over would result in him suddenly finding something.

Next, Merak descended to the eatery on the first floor and checked the seat he’d been at the previous day, but it wasn’t there. It wasn’t anywhere.

“M-Miss Hostess... Could I take a moment of your time?”

“Sure. What is it?”

“Did you spot a sword at this seat yesterday...? It had jewels embedded in the hilt.”

“No, there was nothing like that. We do pick up lost items, but I’d have remembered something showy like that.”

After listening to the hostess’s reply, Merak sat down.

There’s no doubt now. I should have left it on top of the table yesterday, so if I think calmly about it, there’s only one answer.

It was stolen.

Finally, Merak admitted the truth that he didn't want to face, and he clutched his head in his hands. Theft didn't exactly happen rarely in inns. In fact, it was to be expected in the cheaper ones. Merak had purposefully chosen a more expensive inn like this in order to avoid that, but even then, it wasn't perfect. There were no round-the-clock guards like a castle would have for its vault; it was simply an inn that was built in a relatively safer area.

Of course, the inn would refuse problematic customers, but as was obvious from the adventurers who had come by the store yesterday, the person would be let in as long as they had the bare minimum of manners. Though it was debatable whether or not a giant bear getting stuck in the door was good manners. At any rate, there definitely was a possibility that someone had posed as a perfectly fine and decent customer before engaging in thievery, and it probably wouldn't make too much of a difference to the hostess in that case either.

"What? Did you lose something?"

It took him a moment to finally admit, "Yes. Apparently it was stolen..."

"Well, that's no good. Shouldn't you contact the public security corps?"

In the Trade City of Ydalir, the public security corps had been started in order to protect public safety and order. Their purpose was close to the knight brigade in country capitals: to investigate crimes and incidents and arrest the perpetrators. If a victim were to come forward, they might also recover what was stolen. After all, given what the item was, they would probably go all out to find the treasured bejeweled sword of Vanaheim's royal family.

However, that also meant that Merak would have to publicly admit to having allowed the sword to be stolen. With that, even if he were to have gotten the sword back, he still wouldn't be able to avoid the scorn of his people. The ideal would be to retrieve the sword without revealing the incident to the public, but Merak knew that there could be no such convenient ending.

"No, I don't really want this to get out to the public... I mean, I know already. I know that there's no other choice. Aarrgghh... Why did this...? It's over. I'm done..."

"I don't really get it, but is this something you don't want people to know

about?”

If it was found out he had let the sword get stolen, Merak’s reputation would fall into the dirt. Of course, he would no longer have any power as the king. There was no doubt he would only be able to reign as a figurehead. In fact, there was the chance that he could have the throne taken from him. However, allowing the sword to stay stolen would be even worse, which meant that at this point, Merak had no moves left.

However, Merak was the only one who thought so. The hostess had a different idea.

“If that’s the case, you’ve only got one option.”

Merak could only look at her in a quizzical silence.

“Adventurers. Depending on the customer, they’ll take on any request.”

After hearing the hostess’s advice, Merak fought back the urge to heave a sigh. Of course he knew about adventurers. Saying they would do anything was putting it nicely. Basically, it was a job that people fell into because they couldn’t be employed at anything else. While they fought monsters, they were almost all civilians except for a minority who were those who had received knight training but had failed out. The only difference was that adventurers had weapons.

They would be worse at finding things than those who were actually paid to do it. They were ruffians who would do anything depending on the payment... In certain situations, they’d be convenient, but their abilities weren’t to be relied on. If they could, they wouldn’t be adventurers in the first place.

“It’s too early to be so discouraged. There just happens to be a single party here in Ydalir that’s so skilled it makes people wonder why they’re still adventurers.”

“There’s no way. That’s just...”

“They do exist. I don’t really get what’s so great about being adventurers, but they’ve actually turned down invitations from royalty all over the world just because they like being adventurers. They’re kind of eccentric that way. You seriously don’t know about them...? You really are a pampered rich kid, aren’t

you?”

Those words did nothing to clear up Merak’s mood. He was still half in doubt as he looked up at the hostess... Well, it was more like ninety percent doubt. He basically didn’t believe her at all. In fact, that 10 percent belief might not have existed either. The exact ratio of his disbelief to belief could be best described as something like two percent belief and ninety-eight percent doubt. To Merak, it sounded extremely phony.

However, the hostess just laughed seeing Merak’s expression.

At this point, the name of Lufas’s adventuring party was known throughout the world. The leader wasn’t actually set in stone, so in some cases, they could be Alioth’s party or Megrez’s party, but it didn’t change the fact that they were still heroes far outside the norm for adventurers. They’d managed the great feat of slaying a dragon in the past, and they had even taken the heads of the Dragon King Ladon, saving an entire country. The only people who wouldn’t know of them would be pampered kids raised in a thick box, unaware of the outside world. There’d recently even been people who admired them and aimed to become adventurers because of them, and the world was moving towards an unprecedented age of adventuring.

Their daily routine consisted of having breakfast before going to the bar and looking for a job. There’d been a recent boom of requests aimed specifically for Lufas’s party that were so hard even knights couldn’t resolve them, but at the party’s current level, such requests didn’t pose much hardship. It was never decided beforehand what job they would take on; it all depended on their mood for the day. In the silliest of cases, they had even been motivated just by Dubhe wanting to fill himself up with honey, so they’d taken a job to exterminate a bunch of monster bees who had made their nests in a forest.

That day, however, they didn’t even have to go to the bar. Their job came to them.

“Excuse me. Can I have a moment? There’s a request for you all.”

“Hostess?” Megrez asked. “Sorry, but you can’t jump the line for requests. We’d appreciate it if you passed your request through the bar.”

It seemed that the inn’s hostess wanted to ask them for something, but

Megrez cleanly turned her down. They fundamentally did not accept people coming straight to them. Now that Lufas and the others' names had spread so far, it wasn't rare for people to come directly to them with requests. If they allowed direct requests, they'd be swarmed with people coming to them every day.

No matter how famous they were, it didn't change the fact that they were freedom-loving adventurers. They had no intention of being tied down like that. They would be the ones to decide which jobs they took.

"Well, I get that that's how it usually works, but there isn't enough time to do that."

Lufas made a considering grunt as she looked at the hostess.

She doesn't seem to be in that much of a hurry even though she phrased it like that. In fact, she's perfectly calm, which means the hostess isn't the real requester. I'm guessing... She stopped, searching for the likely requester. *It's that guy with the white wings over there who stands out a lot.* Lufas paused, considering him. *Royalty, huh?*

With the exception of her mother, Lufas had completely cut all ties with the heaven-winged. They had an awful custom of persecuting others based on the color of their wings, and royalty stood at the top of all that. Lufas should have been able to separate herself from all those fetters and feelings of disgust as she had her past, but emotions weren't so simple. Lufas could feel something inside her that was hard to describe in words; it was almost like a sputtering.

Meanwhile, Megrez and the hostess continued negotiating. Apparently he had had the treasured sword of the royal family stolen.

"I see... You're right. If we wait too long, then they'll take it outside of Ydalir. And if it makes it to the black market of another country, then it'll be too hard to follow its traces. If we're going to find it, now would be the time," Megrez said, looking at the rest of the party.

For a job like this, things got harder the longer it took, so if they were going to take it, now would have to be the time. However, if they decided not to take on the job, that would also mean throwing away the option to do so later. A decision was needed right now.

“Depends on the reward. Hey, Prince, how much are you gonna pay us?” Alioth asked.

Adventuring wasn't a charitable enterprise. Of course payment was required. The payment was decided by the requester, and if the adventurers were satisfied with it, they would take on the job.

Merak took out a jewel from his pocket. “How about this gem? It should be worth around ten thousand el.”

“Can we take a look at it?”

“Please.”

Phecda appraised the gem that was placed on the table. After some time of looking at it and changing angles, Phecda eventually placed the jewel back down onto the table. “You're right. This could be sold for about ten thousand el. I think this is fine for payment.”

Getting ten thousand el to find a stolen item was pretty extraordinary. At Phecda's words, the other adventurers seemed a little more motivated.

“I'd be fine with taking this job. It might be worth creating a debt with the royal family,” said Mizar.

“I agree too,” said Dubhe, “beary much.”

Mizar and Dubhe also became rather favorable towards taking the request. Jumping the line and going directly to them with requests was fundamentally a no-go, but there were extenuating circumstances this time. Also, selling a favor to the royal family was not a small factor. It would probably have more worth than the gem they were getting as payment.

Lufas considered the offer a little longer, then said, “I also have no objections.”

The next member to agree was Lufas, who everyone had thought would be the one most likely to refuse. Of course, she had never even considered the favor of the royal family. Refusing the job here would not hurt her in the slightest, and she didn't care what those back in her home country would say of her. However, Lufas didn't want to cause her mother back in Vanaheim trouble

because she had refused to help.

“Okay. Then that means we’re taking it?” Alioth asked for a final confirmation.

Everyone nodded. It looked like they would be accepting the job.

Since that was the case, Megrez said, “Then let’s start looking right away. First, I’ll ask around town. Phecda, you stay here and check to see if the thieves left any traces behind.”

“Okay. Leave it to me.”

“I’ll head to the weapons merchants,” Mizar offered. “There’s a chance it’s already on the market.”

Megrez, who had the ability to collect and process information, was in charge of asking around, and Phecda was in charge of looking for traces left behind. Mizar had connections to weapons shops, and he could look into the flow of weapons.

“I’ll try the slums,” said Lufas. “Their leader might know something about the thieves.”

The slums Lufas mentioned were the shadow to Ydalir’s light, and they contained everything that didn’t make it out to that light. The poor lived there, and at the same time, it played host to the safehouses of all those who lived in the shadows. They were cunning, sly, conniving, and clever. They never acted too violently, preferring to blend into the background of daily life.

The area was governed by outcasts that the public security corps couldn’t clean up. These outcasts even cleaned up any people who crossed the line themselves. They were kind of like a shadow public security organization. That was why the public security corps left them alone, silently allowing their existence. Those on the path of shadows were best cleaned up by people from the shadows, and Lufas thought that they might know something about the thieves.

“I’ll go outside and ask the bears,” said Dubhe.

“I’ll...” Alioth considered his options. “I don’t have anything to do. I guess I’ll just help Megrez.”

Dubhe seemed to have a unique method of investigation, but as he tried to sidle out of the inn, he got stuck again. Unfortunately, Alioth had no part to play here, so he had no choice but to act as Megrez's assistant.

* *

Night fell, and Lufas's party gathered at the inn. They had yet to grasp the whereabouts of the royal sword, but they might get an idea by pooling together the knowledge they'd gained that day. Merak, the client, looked really restless and impatient, but Lufas and the others acted like truly experienced adventurers. Not a single one of them looked worried. In fact, they looked relaxed.

"Let's start with what I have first," Megrez said, starting off with the results of his investigations. "Of course, there are no witnesses among those in town. As expected, they weren't fool enough to allow civilians to see them. However, I did check on those entering and exiting Ydalir today and yesterday, and as far as I could see, baggage checks didn't turn up anything that seemed to be what we're looking for. The merchants' carriages had nothing as well. I'm pretty sure we can assume it's still in Ydalir." He hadn't uncovered the exact location of the sword, but he had figured out that it hadn't left Ydalir, so it wasn't a totally wasted effort.

"I'm next..." said Phecda. "As far as I could tell, they started in the neighboring room and climbed along the wall to get in through the window, which means the thieves were staying in one of those rooms. I asked the hostess about those rooms, and there's no doubt they were around when we were yesterday."

It seemed that Phecda had pretty much managed to figure out who the thieves were. Of course, Merak still had no idea who they were, even if it had been revealed that they had stayed next to him, but it seemed that Megrez did.

"Ahh..." said Megrez, seeming to have remembered something. "You mean the man with the head that really stood out who was staring at Merak like he was licking him all over."

"The head..." Lufas realized something at Megrez's words. "You mean the one with the silly hairdo who looked like he had a three-leaf clover on his head,

Megrez?”

“Yeah, something like that. Did that ring a bell, Lufas?”

Apparently Lufas had gotten something as well. “Yeah. There seems to be a thief who will lay their hands on anything as long as it looks like it’s worth money, so he’s being ostracized by those who live in the shadows. That man matches their description. I believe his name was...Clover? I did ask about the location of his hideout, so I guess that’s not going to go to waste.”

Lufas had gotten an important piece of information. With that, they were now a lot closer to catching the thief all at once. However, even if they knew who the thief was, the quest wouldn’t be solved if they couldn’t retrieve the sword itself. All hopes were now pinned on Mizar.

“It was a miss on my end. The sword hasn’t been sold yet, which means that Clover’s still got it in hiding.”

It wasn’t useless. That confirmed Clover was still in possession of the sword, and now they’d gotten another step forward. Without Mizar’s contribution, there had been a possibility that they wouldn’t have noticed that Clover had the sword hidden somewhere, but now that they knew he had it, they wouldn’t fall for it if Clover tried to play dumb.

Now that they had almost all the information they needed, Dubhe was the last one left. Merak couldn’t help but wonder what kind of information he would bring. With everyone’s gazes on him, Dubhe spoke proudly. “I heard of the bearfest spot in the forest to get some delicious honey. Let’s all go for a beary big feast later.”

They all silently kicked Dubhe.

What the hell has this dumb bear been doing while we’ve all been working and finding thieves and treasures?! they all thought.

“Okay. Let’s all hurry up and get to Clover’s hideout. If he’s there, we’ll just capture him on the spot. If he’s not, we can set a trap and wait for him to return.” Megrez laid out their next steps, ignoring Dubhe, who was doubled over.

Of course, no one objected. Lufas and the others immediately left, leaving

Dubhe alone. Dubhe got up and hurriedly chased after them, though he got stuck in the entrance again.

Leaving Dubhe behind, the party reached the slums and entered the safehouse that Lufas had gotten information on. There was no one inside; it didn't seem like Clover was home. Phecda stamped firmly on the ground, seemingly checking something. Eventually, he stopped at the edge of the room and peeled up a floorboard.

"Bingo. Look, it's full of stolen goods."

Phecda had found where Clover was hiding his loot. The little hole had a bunch of treasure and equipment he had no doubt stolen, and each piece was worth a pretty penny. Unfortunately, there was no sign of the sword.

"He'll definitely be back in order to hide the sword."

"Then let's set a trap."

After that, Lufas and the others' actions were swift. Everyone worked briskly, setting traps in the house. Of course, they didn't forget to disguise them, so it didn't look like the house was trapped, and they also made sure to erase any traces of entering the house itself. If they left even a single trace behind, it might give away the fact that someone had infiltrated the place and possibly set traps.

Lufas's party was most famous for their battle prowess, and many tales about them were of their great feats in combat. From that, it was easy to think that they were muscle-brains who tended to ignore small tricks and strategies, and anyone who thought that would be half correct. However, that didn't mean that they couldn't employ such tricks themselves. For jobs like this where they needed to find thieves and other such people, tricks and traps such as these always came in handy. No matter how much power they had, the only use their power would pose in situations like this would be in the rare case that they had to directly confront the perpetrator.

Seeing their brisk work, Merak realized how much he'd underestimated adventurers. He knew that if he'd been alone, then he'd have been running like a headless chicken in confusion. He would never have been able to even get to this point.

“Great. This is it,” said Phecda, declaring the trap complete. “When someone steps on the floor, it will fall out from under them. Once they fall to the bottom, their leg will be caught by a rope. Now all we have to do is wait a ways outside here for our prey to come.”

Everyone retreated from the house. Now all they had to do was wait for the thief to come back. Still, it was silly to have everyone lying in wait nearby, so in actuality, they would only have two people here on rotation while the others rested.

There was no guarantee that Clover would return today, and it was even possible that he would leave Ydalir without returning here at all. Of course, it was more likely that he wouldn’t leave, but all possible courses of action should be considered.

“I’ll stay on watch here. I can see better at night.”

Lufas volunteered to stand watch, and Alioth and the rest of the party didn’t object. They trusted that Lufas wouldn’t make a mistake and let the thief escape if he were to come back. Now they just needed one more person, and things would be perfect. Just then, an unexpected voice piped up.

“I-I’ll stay too. I want to see the perpetrator’s face with my own eyes.”

Surprisingly, Merak, the client himself, volunteered. To be completely blunt, Merak would not change anything by being around. In fact, he might get in the way. To Lufas and the others, the best choice was to have the client wait at the inn so they wouldn’t be able to make any mistakes. However, he had a stake in this case. They understood his desire to look the filthy thief in the eye as well.

Lufas considered Merak’s offer. “Well, that sounds fine. Merak—the client—and I will be enough here. I’m counting on you to continue your investigation.”

“Understood. Don’t push yourself.”

If the thief came back, great. If he didn’t, they just had to rely on Megrez and the others’ investigation abilities. After seeing off Megrez and the others as they left for the slums, Lufas moved to a hiding spot. Then, two hours passed as they watched their trap. The sun had set, and it was dark as the entirety of Ydalir sunk into slumber.

Lufas maintained an appropriate level of awareness of the hideout, but it didn't seem like the thief was coming back any time soon. Merak seemed a bit too vigilant and high-strung, but every once in a while, his gaze wandered from the hideout to Lufas.

Finally, she asked, "Is there something you want to say, Prince?" Lufas glared at him a little as she called him by a moniker with a bit of sarcasm.

Merak faltered slightly as his voice caught in his throat.

One of them was a prince with pure-white wings, and the other a cursed child with pitch-black wings. They both knew of each other, but normally, they would never have been able to meet. They were quite literally the light and shadow of the heaven-winged race. Merak, who was celebrated, lived under the sun, and Lufas, who was even rejected by her own parents, and was forced to live in the shadows. Being able to meet and converse like this was probably a sort of miracle.

"Ah, no, uh... It's just... I thought you were amazing..."

"Amazing?"

"Yeah. I'm lauded as the prince of the heaven-winged, but as you can see, I'm just an incompetent fool who knows nothing of the world and allowed the royalty's bejeweled sword to be stolen. I'm sure if I were thrown out into the world, I wouldn't be able to survive."

Flowers raised and brought to bloom in a greenhouse and under careful watch were beautiful. They were treated precious. They were loved, protected, and cared for, all so they could bloom beautifully. However, it was a fragile beauty that could only be maintained under certain circumstances. Could such a fragile beauty really be considered beautiful? Merak didn't think so. In his opinion, flowers that bloomed strongly and fiercely in the wild were what was truly beautiful.

That was why he compared himself and Lufas that way as well. He was the fragile flower who was raised in a controlled environment, while Lufas was the strong flower who could adapt to her surroundings. That was why she seemed so bright to him.

“You managed to get to where you are by yourself. I’m just walking down a path that’s been set for me, and because it’s been set, I can trip up this badly. When I think about it, I can’t believe how laughable I am.” Merak gave a small sigh as he looked towards the direction of his homeland. “Someday, I will become king. But to be honest, the king doesn’t have to be me. I just happened to be born as royalty. I’m sure pretty much anyone could do the job. If the title of prince was stripped from me, I’m sure there’d be nothing left. When I think about that, you just seem really amazing to me.”

After a moment of consideration Lufas spoke. “What a privileged thing to worry about. You’re blessed just by having a path set for you. I didn’t even have that. I was forced to walk through a wasteland where I wasn’t even sure what would happen tomorrow. You say I got to where I was by myself, but that was just because I had no other choice.”

Merak hesitated, then apologized. “Sorry, that was insensitive.”

“It was. If you have time to be jealous of me, use it to change that path of yours to your liking.”

Merak was slightly surprised at what Lufas had said to him, and he closed his eyes in thought. *Change my path as I like... You know what? I’ve never even thought of that. A set path and a destination that’s already been decided for me... I thought it was my role to simply walk down it, and I felt so empty doing so. But, yeah. Even if the destination is becoming king, I can at least change the path there. What kind of king will I be? What kind of country will I make? I can at least decide that myself.*

“Decide myself...huh? You’re right. I couldn’t even think of doing such a simple thing.”

Merak achingly felt just how soft and pampered he’d been up until now. He’d simply complained in his heart, but never once had he actually tried to make things better. *Just how pampered do I look to this black-winged girl next to me?*

“Our little chat is over. He’s here,” Lufas whispered.

Merak opened his eyes. He saw someone enter the hideout under the cover of darkness. Then, after a few seconds, he heard the sound of someone falling through the floor and a scream. As soon as that happened, Lufas and Merak

barged into the hideout, encountering a man with a unique head who couldn't be missed.

"Clover the thief, I presume? You're under arrest."

"Y-Yooouuu! Don't fuck with me. As if I'd just let myself—"

Before Clover could finish what he was saying, Lufas had closed in on him, assaulting him with her knee. Clover was unable to react or even shout anything at the sudden action. All he could do was show the whites of his eyes as he fell to the floor. Then, the stolen sword fell from his person and onto the ground.

"Looks like this settles it."

Lufas looked down at Clover before lifting him up by the scruff of his neck as if he were a cat. Like that, the curtains closed on the stolen-sword incident that had almost shamed the entire royal family.

* *

The next day, Lufas's party went to the bar as usual, and there they found Merak, their client from yesterday. The fact that he was still here after getting his sword back showed how unexpectedly brazen he was. Or maybe he was just a careless man. After speaking with the bar's owner about something, he headed for the exit. That was when he noticed Lufas's party.

"Ah, Lufas. And the rest of your party too."

"You're from yesterday... What're you doing here?"

Lufas and the others often used this bar as their hangout spot, but it definitely was not a nice, clean place. It was frequented by hoodlum-like adventurers, and at the very least, it was not the sort of place royalty should step foot in. However, when confronted with Megrez's question, Merak gave a seriously unexpected response.

"Um... I was registering as an adventurer."

"Wha—?" Megrez couldn't stop himself, but that response was only natural. "Sorry, are you serious?"

To the world at large, being an adventurer was just one step above being a useless thug. They were pretty much rock bottom. In fact, there probably were

quite a number of people who thought adventurers were just thugs who were willing to dip their hands in anything. It was not a job for royalty by any measure.

However, Merak had already decided on it. He seemed completely set.

“I’m serious. For this year away from my country... I plan to use this year to widen the breadth of my experience. After seeing you all in action yesterday, I realized how pampered and soft I was. Not to mention... I want to become like all of you.”

“Ha! What a strange example of royalty we have here.” After hearing that, Alioth seemed rather astounded.

A prince becoming an adventurer was unheard of. After all, why would they, when they could live a comfortable life without stooping to such a low-paying job with life-threatening consequences? But Lufas was the only one who wore a gentle smile, even as she seemed just as astounded as everyone else.

“Isn’t it all right? He decided on it himself after all.”

With just that, Lufas cut in front of Merak and entered the bar.

I’m not a fan of royalty, but this man’s a little different from the rest. He’s worth at least a little respect, she thought.

After that, Merak would come to flourish as an adventurer little by little, and he ended up taking requests along with Lufas’s party several times. Then, half a year later, he’d completely been influenced by her and ended up joining Lufas’s party. Whether meeting Lufas was lucky or unlucky was something he could not know at that time. However, the one thing Merak could say was that this year was the happiest he’d ever been.

Yes. At this time, his heart was still filled with hopes and dreams.



Lufas's Party Continues Their Journey

Traveling naturally meant consuming food and other supplies, and it was definitely no cheap enterprise. After all, in this group, all the monsters starting with Aries needed much more food than their appearances suggested. Of course, because they were anthropomorphized and their bodies had become smaller, they wouldn't be eating several tonnes worth of food. Even then, they could all easily down several times more than a normal person could, so it needn't be said that a steady source of food was absolutely necessary.

In this case, they relied on alchemy as their cash cow. Dina would go to the market and sell the equipment and golems that Lufas had made offhandedly, all of which were basically like toys to them, but just items of that quality had managed to turn into a decently sized fortune.

Of course, if Lufas actually put effort into it, things wouldn't settle with just a small fortune. They would end up with enough money to live life in the lap of luxury for several generations, and they wouldn't even have to think about money from then on. If Lufas did that, however, then all the items currently flowing through the market would lose all of their value, destroying the economy. Many people would probably even lose their jobs. So, Dina had purposefully asked Lufas to keep her creations under a certain level of power. Even then, though, Lufas would sometimes create something with absurd capabilities in a fit of whimsy.

On this day, Dina was once again in the Trade City of Ydalir, selling her wares while being fraught with worry.

"This is no good... This has way too much attack too..."

Considering current standards, having an attack boost of around +100 would make a weapon a famous masterpiece of the strongest class. However, an attack bonus of just +100 might as well not be there to Lufas, only holding as much value as any random knife. So Lufas would easily and carelessly make weapons that reached far into the triple digits. If Dina allowed any of those to

reach the market, it would cause a huge fuss, so she had to throw herself into the task of choosing only those with the lowest capabilities.

“Oh, you’re selling weapons here? Are there any you recommend?” a passing man who seemed like a knight asked.

“Yes, I am. How about this one?” said Dina, recommending him a sword.

Its name was “Dull Blade.” It was a sword that offered a scant boost of +70.

As a small detail, in this day and age, knights employed at a royal castle usually only had weapons that offered around +30 at most.

“Oohhh... This is wonderful. Not even the captain has a sword this good. I’ll pay a lot for it. How much?”

“Five hundred el.”

“Cheap! I’ll take it!”

Five hundred el was actually a fairly decent amount of money. The fact that he was able to drop that amount on a dime really showed that he was a knight.

With that sword sold, other customers quickly stopped by.

“You’ve got some damn fine wares here. Hey, shopkeep, would you happen to stock golems as well?”

It seemed that the next customer was a noble. To people of that social class, golems were rather popular.

Dina replied to the noble’s query with a smile and a, “Yes, I do.” Then, she pretended like she was going to the back of the store and dragged a Lufas-made golem that had been stored in her Exgate out to the front.

【Steel Robot: Metal Z】

【Level】: 400

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【HP】: 3800

Miss Lufaaaaaaaassss?!

This is awful. I reminded her so much, but she still lets her interests take over and makes weird things like this!

The golem also had a uselessly large amount of skills, and Dina was able to confirm that it could do things like fire rocket punches or beams from its eyes, just like Libra. It was clearly far too strong for a normal noble to own. Dina hurriedly stuffed Metal Z back into her Exgate.

“Hmm? What’s wrong? Weren’t you going to sell me that golem?”

“I-I’m terribly sorry. That golem was defective. This one here is in working order.”

Dina made an excuse and retrieved a different golem. Even the weaker golem more than satisfied the noble, and Dina was able to avoid any follow-up questions.

“This should do it for today... Okay then...” Dina said as she looked inside her Exgate.

Inside, there were piles of high-performance equipment and golems which could in no way be allowed on the market, lying around like industrial waste.

Dina stared at it all silently. “What do I do with all of this?”

As long as Lufas would not stop following her desires and interests, this pile would only continue to grow. Unfortunately, Lufas would probably never stop.

As an aside, the very next day Lufas once again didn’t even think about relative power levels and ended up handing a fairly powerful weapon to Sei.

Afterword

Those eyes resemble a little sister's...

Those ears resemble a little sister's...

There are no little sisters more capable than their older brothers! Hello, everyone. Thank you all very much for reading volume 6 of *A Wild Last Boss Appeared!*

The main event of this volume was the cheater of the twins, Pollux, going on a rampage. This character, Pollux, is a rare one among the Twelve Stars in that she possesses common sense even though most everyone else in the group has thrown that away. She is also the most virtuous person in the group after Virgo. Compared to the Four Kings of problem children who are never up to any good when they get screen time—the Scales, the Goat, the Scorpion, and the Lion—she is indeed very good.

However, unlike her personality, her abilities were just as absurd and cheat-like as the other Twelve Stars, if not more. Pollux could take on all the other Twelve Stars by herself at once. Does she even need her older brother?

Unlike the other Stars, the siblings Pollux and Castor are considered a single Star, and buffing both of them together would make them head and shoulders above the rest, as they're split between the one with the stats and the one with the skills. However, as a result, Pollux has very weak base stats, which allow her skills to get even sillier. Somehow, she ended up as a ridiculously unbalanced character.

On the other hand, Castor has stats that fall below Aries's and no finishing unique ability to speak of... In all honesty, Castor isn't even as strong as the other Twelve Stars. He's about even with Fenix and Hydras, who only made their appearance at the end of the volume.

Seriously, is the older brother even needed at this point?

Well, stuff like that is basically a must-have in inflated battle series like this

one. Characters who end up being introduced later in series like this have to be made stronger to keep up with the power creep. This work is the same in that regard. Unlike Aries, who came first and isn't that strong, characters that come later like Leon and Pollux are absurd.

Although there is a certain murderous maid who was introduced in volume 2 and still reigns supreme in the rankings for strongest...

Still, that doesn't mean that all the Twelve Stars who appeared earlier are weak. Aries is a bit lacking in the pure battle department, but his unique ability scales well with his opponent, so depending on the situation, he'll do even more than Leon. Not to mention the fact that Aigokeros is quite strong in his own right if he actually tries.

Huh? Then what about Karkinos, you say?

...

Well, as for the crab... He's quite good at being a shield, I suppose.

Anyway, around the time this volume 6 goes on sale, so will volume 1 of the comic version. If you happen to have any interest, please look it up. The great Hazuki's beautiful illustrations are necessary for Lufas's battles, which have, up until now, only been described in words.

Actually, I feel weird saying this as the author, but it's like I didn't realize their fights were so ridiculous. When I was writing, I was just like, "She's called the Great Conqueror, so she should at least be able to do this much, right?" But when I saw the actual art, I was blown away. Like Aries's tackles... I wonder how many kilometers of land get burned by one of those... There's also like whenever Lufas activates Pressure, or when Mars starts running around and he looks surprisingly strong. There's a lot of cool places like that to look for.

But seeing my own work become a manga is a strange feeling. The last time this happened was in grade school when I drew my own crap manga. It was a manga where for some reason Son Go○ would only ever face forward, and as the panels went on, the art became more and more sloppy until the entire thing fell apart. In the end, he became a stick man from the neck down, still only facing forward as he beat up the enemies next to him without any sense of power or feeling at all.

Yeah, back then I couldn't even draw characters from the side. Oh man, that part of my past was embarrassing. Not only that, but back then, I liked drawing even though I was so bad at it, so I drew a whole bunch, and now I just write, so it looks like my ability to draw has gotten even worse. That's why people who can draw are so amazing to me.

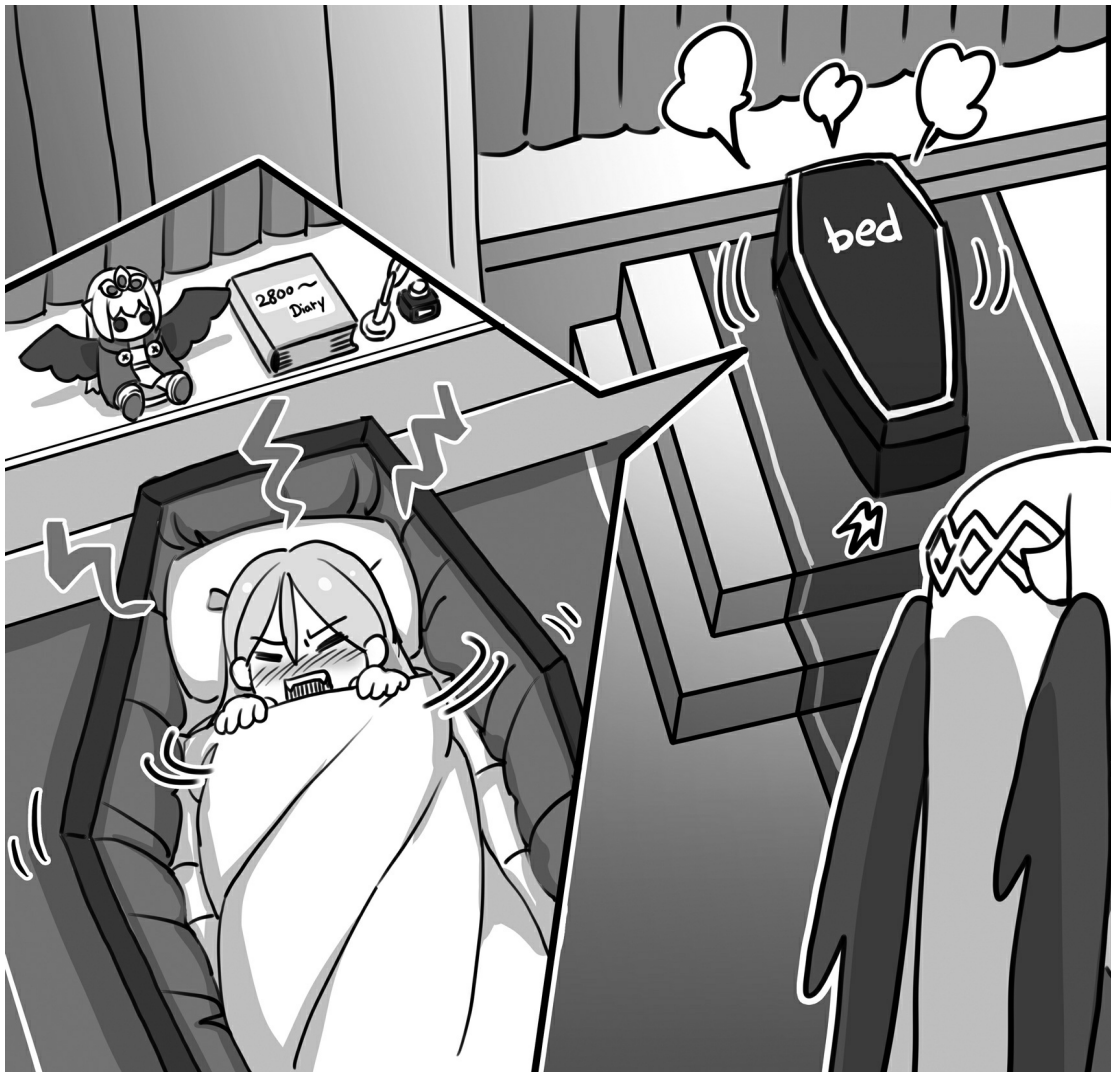
I'm actually not sure myself how flashy the battle art for the comic version will get from now on, but if any of you have any interest, then it would make me happy to see you read that as well. Comic versions are great. They're cheap, after all.

As for me, whenever I look for a new light novel, I always start from the comic version. Then, if it's interesting, I'll move on to the original work. I think there are quite a number of people who're the same, so I can't help but hope a little that this opportunity will increase my readers a little more...

Anyway, the story is now at its climax, and there are only a few enemies left. In terms of volumes, there'll only be two or maybe three more at most. The final fight with Alovenus is definitely getting closer.

And so, everyone, let us meet again in the next volume.

-Firehead



Benet's just way too cute...!
I want to draw Benet way
more, but that also goes
for so many other great
characters. It's troubling.
Please make a spin-off
with the vampire princess
as the main character lol.

YahaKo

SHOVE

Bonus Short Stories

Castor's Unique Skill

"Oh, now that I think about it, does Castor not have a unique skill?"

It was a simple bit of aimless musing that slipped out of Scorpius's mouth during the journey. Lufas and her group were heading to their next destination on the transport golem Suzuki, so the passengers were fundamentally without anything to do. This wouldn't be the case on a normal journey, but thanks to Suzuki, they couldn't help but have an abundance of time. So killing time by chatting like this was a common thing.

The subject of the conversation this time was one half of the twins, Castor.

"Now that you mention it," said Aries, "I don't remember ever seeing Castor use a unique skill."

The fact that Aries, the oldest member of the Twelve Stars, didn't know meant that no one else would either. Everyone's gazes, other than Lufas's, gathered on Castor, who could do nothing but awkwardly scratch at his cheek.

"Uh... I command the Argonautai..."

"That's not a skill though. Isn't there, you know, anything else?" Aigokeros asked. "Something ridiculous and unfair, like your sister's."

"If there is, I'd appreciate it if you let us know now. Given the fights that are to come, having an accurate picture of your allies' abilities will be important," said Libra.

Castor just continued to look more and more uncomfortable. The others couldn't fathom why. There was no way he would be like Leon with no unique skills.

After some more uncomfortable silence, Castor said, "I can summon *The Argo*..."

“I believe that is also one of your sister’s skills,” Libra pointed out.

Castor fell silent. He could only summon the flying ship named the *Argo* whenever his sister was nearby. However, that was also one of his little sister’s skills. It was effectively a unique skill for both of them because its condition for use was for Castor to be near her, but his little sister, Pollux, was actually the only one with the skill.

“I’ve thought this for a while now, but aren’t you twins a little too mismatched power-wise?”

“You boast that you can lead an army, but Lufas can do that too. To be honest, you aren’t exactly needed.”

“Grk!”

Castor was getting beaten into smithereens. Thanks to his little sister’s abnormal powers, he looked all the more incompetent.

“So in the end, you don’t actually have one?” Karkinos asked.

Resigned, Castor raised his head and looked at them, and when he put on a smile, his teeth seemed to sparkle. That was all. Nothing else happened.

The rest of the group collectively reacted with a confused expression, but Lufas jumped in with an explanation. “Unique skill: Hot Smile. Its effect is to double the power and impact of his handsomeness. It is not useful in battle.”

There was nothing but silence for a few moments. Then Karkinos said, “O-Okayyy then. M E needs to get our meal ready.”

“I-I’ll go keep watch outside.”

“Me too.”

Castor’s unique skill had been revealed, but the entire group decided not to touch on it. Sometimes, saying nothing was a kindness. Not all unique skills were powerful. That was the lesson of the conversation that day.

A Wild Last Boss Didn’t Appear!

Rather suddenly, I had a thought.

I—or rather, Lufas Mapphaahl—had gone on a rampage two hundred years ago, completely rewriting the landscape of power across the land. Before that, Benetnasch, Leon, the Devil King, and Ladon had all ruled over their own continents in a stalemate. However, Lufas had eventually taken down one of them. So, my thought was that if Lufas had not appeared, what would the world look like now?

When I voiced that thought, Dina seemed to sink into thought. “Well, the most likely outcome would be the Devil King’s victory. The most unlikely one would be Leon’s victory.”

“I understand why the Devil King’s victory is likely, but is Leon that disadvantaged? I feel like he’d put up a pretty good fight though.”

“No way. Never. First of all, that lion’s territory is in way too bad a spot.”

Dina spread out a paper on the table as she continued to explain, drawing a simple map. She outlined rough continent shapes in the upper left, upper right, center, lower left, and lower right of the paper along with chibi-fied versions of the ruling powers next to each continent. The upper left was Benetnasch, the upper right Orm, Pollux in the lower left, Ladon in the lower right, and Leon in the center.

Seeing that, even I could clearly see what she was getting at. He didn’t stand a chance.

“Ah, yeah... That’s no good.”

“Exactly,” said Dina. “He’s in the center, so he’ll be taking fire from all sides. Even if Pollux didn’t participate, he’d one hundred percent get ganged up on by Benetnasch, Ladon, and the Devil King,” Dina said as she drew an X over Leon.

“Next, Ladon would immediately target humanity’s territories, while Benetnasch would charge at the Devil King, so they wouldn’t clash,” Dina went on. “Also, Benetnasch wouldn’t nearly be the monster she is now, so she’d just lose to the Devil King. As for Ladon, the hero approved by the Goddess would probably arrive and kill him after he rampaged for some time. After that, the hero would then set his sights on the Devil King, and they would both defeat each other, ending the story.”

As expected of the official last boss. The Devil King really is amazingly strong.

I was satisfied with that explanation, but Dina continued on. “But... The chance of this happening is low, but Benetnasch could also awaken, turning it into Benetnasch’s victory. After all, she is the kind of monster who can break through her own limits. Given that, it’s plenty possible that she could grasp victory. Either that, or she could tie with the Devil King leaving Ladon the victor.”

Daaaaang Benetnasch...

Somehow she stuck out head and shoulders above all the other Seven Heroes in terms of ridiculous power levels. *I wonder why?*

“Other than that... In the worst case, Aigokeros could invade from underground, resulting in the victory of the Demon King. In that case, the entire world would become Hel.”

After a moment of silent surprise, I asked, “Is he really that strong?”

“You might have forgotten, Miss Lufas, but Aigokeros is crazy scary when he’s serious. Honestly, he could be the strongest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars.”

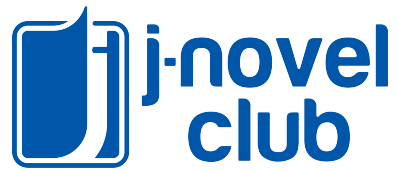
Seriously? He’s that strong? I just have an impression of him always losing...

“By the way, is there any possibility of Leon winning?”

“No.”

Apparently Leon was destined to lose no matter what. *Too bad, Leon.*





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A Wild Last Boss Appeared! Volume 6

by Firehead

Translated by Kevin Chen Edited by Kathleen Townsend

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